

Lisa Atwood Wilkinson

Parmenides and *To Eon*

Reconsidering Muthos and Logos



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*For my parents, Bruce and Margot,
and
my children, Chris and Faith*

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Introduction

Mapping a Route to Parmenides

We attribute the philosophical poem, later called *On Nature*, to Parmenides, a single poet-philosopher, hailing from Elea.¹ But of the man Parmenides little more can be said than that he was possibly a pupil of Xenophanes, but “converted to the contemplative life” by association with the Pythagorean Ameinias, after whose death he possibly built a shrine. Parmenides might also have served the citizens of Elea and most likely “flourished” in the sixty-ninth Olympiad.² This brief account of “what is said” of Parmenides is compiled from second- and third-hand sources. In Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, this information comes from what Diogenes records on account of what Antiphon writes on account of what Pythodorus said, and from what Theophrastus, Sotion, and Speusippus “record,” although their information does not always concur.³ That even in antiquity basic facts about Parmenides do not concur suggests to me the crux of the problem we face in the twenty-first century when we read Parmenides’ poem. It is a problem concerning not the paucity or scarcity of text from the ancient world, but a difficulty created by our modern dependency upon, and reception of, text as if all texts at all times are meant to serve the same communicative purposes in the same ways. Prior to the formation of text, we are forced to say “there is not much we can say,” yet this supposition reveals the literate bias we bring—perhaps cannot help to bring—to the text itself.

In 2008, the fact remains that for most of us learning our native language includes learning how to read and write, for we are not credited with mastery of our language until we are literate. If we consider how those who are unable to read and to write are severely disadvantaged in their attempts to seek and gain employment, access public transportation, vote, locate telephone numbers, and even

cook, their inability to perform what we often consider to be tasks that demand the most minimal of practical knowledge demonstrates the cultural significance and value we place upon our own literacy. Simply put: reading and writing affords us a certain knowledge of the world. Yet because we live in such a highly developed state of literacy we not only tend to overlook our own illiterate citizens, it has become increasingly difficult for us to identify, evaluate, and appreciate knowledge that obtains in the absence of the written word.

Some recent studies maintain that the internet revolution and concomitant e-mail, instant messengers, text messaging, two-way pagers, and the like, “break the barriers” or even “blur distinctions” between speech and writing. But often these studies fail to consider that there are palpable aspects of speech that cannot be duplicated by writing.⁴ Moreover, the idea that something like e-mail can stand in for or replace spoken conversation suggests a general tendency to consider all forms of communication with the hindsight provided by the written word.⁵ In this way, those who can neither read nor write are called “illiterate,” and even a culture whose primary vehicle of communication is speech rather than writing is called, collectively, “preliterate.” The emphasis of each term contrasts and compares a developed state of literacy to either its under- or predevelopment.

Historically, the terms “pre-” or “protoliterate” refer to the gradual evolution and development of writing that emerges from the otherwise nonliterate practices of *Magna Graecia*. Beginning with *scripta forma* dating to at least the twelfth century,⁶ we have been able to trace the development of a specifically Greek alphabet through half a millennium. Many scholars discuss this historical period in terms of an evolution or a transition between an oral and a written tradition, that is, a transition from a culture of speaking and toward a culture of writing.⁷ Although the development of writing and its adaptation into patterns of the general culture is gradual,⁸ some scholars maintain that an increasing dependency upon writing for tasks such as poetic composition and political organization can be traced back to the seventh and sixth centuries, less than a hundred years before the time Parmenides “flourished.” While the primary vehicle of communication remains the spoken word, it seems that the written word is becoming more and more accessible as an alternative

means of communication. One might claim, then, that during Parmenides' era, writing comes to have a certain effect on poetry and, perhaps, on politics. Then again, there is substantial evidence—in, say, the dialogues of Plato⁹—to suggest that for the ancient Greeks writing is considered to be a “suspicious” or less reliable means of communication than speech.

Moreover, if we widen our frame of reference beyond ancient Greece, we begin to see that a pattern of suspicion about the written word obtains until—at least—the modern era. Eric Havelock suggests that we consider the figure of the feudal baron: although unlettered and often coarse or brutal he was nonetheless an “effective governor so far as he has at his side the monk or the clerk who commands the essential technology [i.e., the written word] by which his power is made effective in transmission”¹⁰ (126–27). Havelock's point is that not only does the feudal baron neither read nor write, he would not *deign* to do so. By analogy, a similar situation exists in Mycenaean Greece, during which writing appears in the form of administrative tabulations of marks and lines carved into stones and tablets. These “marks” are highly specified and codified, intelligible only to a narrow margin of clerical workers whose sole function was to record “inventories” and to report to the king who himself was not able to decipher the markings, and indeed would not wish to do so (117).

Neither the Mycenaean king nor the feudal baron would wish to decipher the writing because in a nonliterate or preliterate culture flourishing a document to gain command or control of a crowd is, as Aristophanes shows us, comical and a sign of a leader's incompetence.¹¹ In the prehistory of writing, then, the most respectable means available for persuading and guiding one's community is speech. Hence, any analysis of an ancient text must at least consider the cultural value of speech in antiquity as well as the values associated with preserving speech *to or as* text in a developing technology of writing.¹²

For us, the developing technology of writing means, of course, that any ancient text available to us *is available* due to the historical intersection of orality and literacy. This intersection is particularly acute with regard to Parmenides, however, because more than any other early philosopher Parmenides composes in Homeric speech.

Hence, the very means by which Parmenides practices philosophy is contrary to what we, as contemporary philosophers, recognize as philosophy. This ‘misfit’ between Parmenides’ work and our own occurs on a number of levels. First, as contemporary philosophers, we are formally trained to communicate our most significant ideas in writing or in reading aloud our written words. For us, at least, the practice of philosophy in large part depends upon our mastery of written texts. The proliferation of national and international conferences that require written proposals and papers for presentation, as well as the burgeoning business of academic presses that solicit and market “philosophy” textbooks, contributes to the fact that—in our time—reading and writing are as basic to teaching and communicating philosophy as they were perhaps remarkable—and troubling—to Plato and his predecessors.

Second, that we do identify Parmenides as a philosopher, or more appropriately a poet-philosopher, suggests that Parmenides in some way departs from the poetic tradition by making and warranting claims that resonate with our conception of philosophy. But the historical position of Parmenides’ text—poised as it is between orality and literacy—means that one of the issues impacting our reception of Parmenides and his work bears upon whether and how a “philosophical” appropriation of a certain way of communicating is entailed by or concomitant with emerging literacy. That is, is it the development of writing that makes Parmenides’ thought possible, and is it thereby the emergence of literacy that makes what we recognize as philosophy possible? The sense of “philosophical” most appropriate to early Greek thinkers is *sophia*—wisdom;¹³ early Greek thinkers are known as *hoi sophoi*. A specific question, then, is whether emerging literacy enhances, threatens, or perhaps even has no bearing upon, what the archaic Greeks conceive as “wisdom.” For there is also evidence to suggest that in archaic Greece writing reflects, enhances, but also *betrays* the communicative practices of the oral tradition. Historically speaking then, one cannot assume, as Derrida says the Western tradition assumes, that writing is prior to speech.¹⁴ To the contrary, recent scholarship in classical anthropology, philosophy, and philosophy, suggests that the dispositions and teleologies of speakers differ significantly from the dispositions and teleologies

of writers.¹⁵ Even if we assume that all communication is meant to effect some purpose, it nevertheless does not follow that all modes of communication effect the same purposes in the same ways. And this could mean, among other things, that there are differences and limits to what one can achieve through speech and through writing. Might these differences bear upon how we understand Parmenides' "philosophy"?

If so, then the task of interpreting Parmenides' text demands analysis and appreciation of an archaic Greek disposition to and experience of speech, specifically Homeric speech—that type of speech that comprises the vocabulary and rhythm of Parmenides' poem. One of the most compelling, recent analyses of Homeric speech occurs in Marcel Detienne's *Masters of Truth*.¹⁶ Here, Detienne suggests that prior to questions about the relationship of speech to reality (philosophy), and prior to certain "theories of language" which treat language as a tool for persuasion and political assembly (rhetoric), nonliterate Greeks display a certain disposition to, and experience of, language that ill fit modern and contemporary accounts of language. Contrary, then, to our basic assumptions about speech, an archaic Greek disposition reflects a general cultural expectation about the unique role a certain type of speech plays in archaic culture. Detienne argues that from at least the ninth century on, there develops a "single model of speech with shared gestures, practices, and institutions" (13). Detienne names this single model of speech "sung speech" or "efficacious" speech. Sung speech does not simply describe reality; rather sung speech affects reality or, in a quite literal sense, makes what is real happen. Detienne's analysis is intriguing because it not only gives us a glimpse into a communicative practice quite foreign to our own, the phenomenon of "sung speech" suggests a general disposition toward language which transcends its boundaries as a medium. That is, if "sung speech" is the type of speech that makes things happen, then "sung speech" exhibits and solicits a power or force that moves beyond or through the particular and concrete details and images that *we normally associate* with the limitations of speech. This implies that the archaic Greeks may have sustained an entirely different set of attitudes and expectations for speech than our own. If, as I will try to show, the archaic Greeks did not always, if

ever, adhere to what we call a representationalist account of language, and would be more likely to recognize a nonrepresentationalist function of language,¹⁷ then our ways of explaining and rationalizing ancient Greek texts by means of a representationalist account of language will be incomplete, if not inaccurate or misleading. Seen in this light, the issue is not so much about the limitations of an exegesis informed by our literate biases; rather, what is at stake is the imposition of a conceptual scheme upon texts that did not emerge from this scheme, and, accordingly, may be distorted by such an imposition.

I identify the possibility of our distortions of ancient texts as an historical *and* philosophical problem. While lack of attention to historical context might cause us to impose certain philosophical—and metaphilosophical—theories upon ancient texts, lack of philosophical insight might cause us to distort the meaning and significance of these texts, forcing them to say too much or too little.¹⁸ For example, while Martin Heidegger helps reorient our understanding of the historicity of texts, he does tend to undervalue the particular and contextual details of communicative practices devoted to preserving and transmitting culturally significant information prior to the formation of texts. That is, although Heidegger pays homage to the dynamics of oral communication in ancient culture, I suggest that he does not sufficiently consider how the practices of oral communication influence the thought and the reception of the early Greek thinkers he writes about. Heidegger's analyses of early Greek thinking are primarily performed through Heidegger's own literate lens.

Too, while perhaps no one more than Eric Havelock helps reorient our understanding of the significance of the oral tradition to ancient Greek philosophy, Havelock does tend to offer a monolithic—or monolinguistic—image of the purpose and intent of ancient philosophy. The possibility that thinkers like Xenophanes and Parmenides are more closely and conceptually associated to oral poetry than to Plato and Aristotle, and that this association might be the basis of Xenophanes' and Parmenides' philosophical significance, is not—I submit—sufficiently considered in Havelock's writings.¹⁹

But if we gather together the insights of Heidegger and Havelock, as well as the insights of others influenced or inspired by their work,

I suggest that we might be able to begin to “hear” anew the wisdom of our first philosophical texts. Hence, I take a historical-philosophical route to Parmenides. This route begins with an analysis of the significance of “Homer” in ancient Greek culture that challenges some of our common knowledge about “Homer” and how oral poetry works (Chapter 1). These challenges are supplemented by an overview of Homeric or “sung speech” (Chapter 2) that is brought to bear on assumptions about Xenophanes’ fragments (Chapter 3) and contemporary accounts of speech (Chapter 4). Having reconsidered Homer, Xenophanes, and basic assumptions about speech, the final chapters offer an interpretation of Parmenides’ poem (Chapter 5) that differs from some of our general accounts (Chapter 6).

Central to my analysis throughout is the claim that, in light of the pervasiveness of Homeric speech in ancient Greek culture, the distinction *we* make between philosophy and mythology might actually hinder rather than help our understanding of Parmenides’ poem. For instance, we readily agree that a tremendous gulf divides the communicative practices and purposes of Homer from the communicative practices and purposes of Parmenides. Both figures are considered to be poets, yet the briefest glimpse at their respective “works” reveals significant differences. This difference, however, cannot be explained in terms of the vocabulary each poet employs, for recent analysis shows that nearly all of the terms used by Parmenides have their source in the Homeric epics.²⁰ Rather, the difference between Homer’s and Parmenides’ poetry is usually explained by appeal to the difference between mythology and philosophy, or between *muthos* and *logos*. But in fact there is only one section of Parmenides’ poem that does not explicitly mirror the poets who precede him, and perhaps because of its apparent uniqueness in archaic literature, it is just this section—the “Way of Truth”—that so often captures our attention. Consequently, we tend to diminish, if not ignore, the mythical or more poetic sections of Parmenides’ poem under the assumption that while these sections appeal or hearken back to the oral tradition from which they come, the “Way of Truth” looks forward to a more logical and philosophical way of thinking and speaking, which awaits, as it were, fuller expression in the written dialogues of Plato and the treatises of Aristotle.²¹

Still, an entire network of associations and inferences is implicit in such an explanation and interpretation of Parmenides' poem. Primarily at work is the allegedly self-evident distinction between *muthos* and *logos*, as well as its ties to the transition from orality to literacy. I suggest, however, that we should be cautious about the presuppositions involved in these distinctions and their implications. For while it is apparently the case that the subject matter of sections of Parmenides' poem differs significantly from the topics we associate with traditional "sung" poetry, it does not follow that we should conflate these differences by appealing to a broader category or classificatory schema to explain them. Although the "Way of Truth" anticipates something we typically call "philosophy," or specifically call "metaphysics," and our version of Homer's epics resembles something we typically call "mythology," it may be circular to appeal to the differences between philosophy and mythology in order to explain the gulf between Homer and Parmenides. When we do make such an appeal—and in an attempt to avoid circularity—we set up a broader category, a genus rather than a species, and this broader category is based in turn upon the supposed differences between literacy and orality. That is, we appeal to the differences between philosophy and mythology in order to explore the connection between the development of writing and the birth of philosophy, and this appeal might be plausible and historically accurate. But then we maintain, based on this classificatory schema, that both writing and philosophy stand in contrast to orality and mythology. Mythology stands to orality as philosophy stands to literacy, and so while mythology is meant to be recited and heard, philosophy is meant to be written and read. Yet this equation not only reifies a system of values particular to philosophy and literacy, it does so by the simultaneous devaluing of the significance of mythology *in terms of* the limitations of orality.

For example, analyzing the associations between literacy, philosophy, orality, and mythology, Jean-Pierre Vernant writes:

Because it is possible, when reading a text, to turn back and analyze it critically, the operation of reading presupposes a quite different attitude of mind—both more detached and at the same time more

demanding—from that involved in listening to spoken discourse. The Greeks themselves were fully aware of this; they contrasted on the one hand the charm that speech must deploy to hold its listeners under its spell and, on the other, the somewhat austere but more rigorous gravity of writing, and often gave preference to the latter.²²

Although Vernant's claim might hold true for our particular (literate) picture of the connection between philosophy and literacy, it is far from clear that archaic Greeks would agree with his suggestion about the intrinsic value of reading. Indeed, how could they agree when they configured the activity of reading as physically rather than intellectually "rigorous" and so fit only for slaves?²³ While it seems plausible to us to explain the gulf between Homer and Parmenides by appeal to developing literacy and its influence on philosophy, we cannot readily assume that philosophy and literacy are somehow independent of, or even considered by the archaic Greeks to be *progressive* from, the traditions of mythology and orality, i.e., that reading and writing is more intellectually demanding than hearing and speaking, and that mythology is more entertaining and charming and thereby less profound than the austere heights and subject matter of philosophy. To the contrary, our first philosophers do not seem committed to such a distinction and so it is in some way fitting to begin with reference to the thinker who simultaneously encourages and destabilizes this distinction: Plato.

Chapter 1

A Route to Homer

The idea that there is a significant difference between speaking and writing receives one of its first written expressions in Plato's Seventh Epistle when he asserts that a thinker's "best thoughts" are never committed to writing but "stored away, with the fairest of his possessions." For Plato, someone who is serious about "studying high matters will be the last to write about them" because knowledge about such matters, once known, is "in no danger of being forgotten." Knowledge of such matters is contained in "the briefest of formulas," brief enough, we might infer, to abide shining in the soul once known. And so writing, when it comes to communicating knowledge of high matters is, at best, unnecessary, and at worse, evidence of an unstable mind: "And if he has committed these serious thoughts to writing, it is because men, not the gods, 'have taken his wits away.'"²⁴

Since Plato's writings are often said to constitute to the very origin of European philosophy, Plato's apparent aversion to writing marks one of the paradoxes of the history of philosophy: the writer by whom we come to understand what philosophy is not himself committed to the practice of philosophy in writing. We might avoid this paradox by reasoning that since Plato's comments about the relationship between writing and knowledge are written, they are intentionally ironic, false, forged, or unimportant.²⁵ Still, regardless of the variety of ways we in the twenty-first century interpret Plato's indictment of writing, the history of philosophy has forged forward upon the strength of a distinction that entails a series of hard questions and partial answers: if knowledge of high matters cannot, or should not, be written down, how can it be communicated? Since Plato writes dialogues about Socrates, who does not write anything, we might infer that knowledge of high matters, for Plato, is an object or aspect

of dialogue. But it cannot be just any type of dialogue that confers knowledge: it would have to be dialogue of a certain type, about certain topics, and within a certain structure. Knowledge of high matters would have to be communicated in a dialogue resembling the dialectic, and this dialectic would have to be about or concerned with “high matters” such as forms, first principles, or truth.

In this way, Plato’s indictment of writing also forces us to consider that besides its inability to convey knowledge, writing is also not conducive to truth. In the modern world, something unknown cannot be true because for us truth is a matter and manner of judgment about what is known. For us, truth entails knowledge: in the absence of knowledge there can be no truth.²⁶ If writing for Plato does not contain knowledge, then (1) either writing also does not contain truth, or (2) Plato’s concept of truth differs from our own. Either side of this disjunct, however, leads on to further questions about the status and purpose of Plato’s writings. That is, if Plato never writes the truth down, then where does truth exist for him? That truth does or must exist is evident in his repeated use of the term *aletheia*, but since this is a written truth is it therefore not truthful, i.e., not constitutive of knowledge? Moreover, that Plato mentions truth without, perhaps, providing for it a written referent holds out the possibility for truth elsewhere than in—at least Plato’s—writing. Yet, given that all that is preserved of “Plato” is in some written form—whether the writings we attribute to him or the writings that mention or are in some sense about him—Plato’s “truth,” or the truth we associate with Plato, is, *on Plato’s own terms*, enigmatic.

Whether a contemporary philosopher attempts to answer or even consider these issues, the differences between speech, writing, and their relationship—if any—to truth is firmly established at what all philosophers recognize as the very beginning of the history of European philosophy. Happily, there are historical precedents which help explain the low esteem in which Plato holds writing. Yet the prehistory of Plato is no less confounding when attempting to sort out Plato’s comments than the history that begins with these comments. For instance, some scholars believe that although Homer and his epics constitute what we can know of an archaic Greek oral tradition—a type of prehistory of writing—Homer’s epics also

constitute our first writing. That is, while writing provides the means by which Homer is preserved, the Homer that is preserved is *prima facie* oral. So, in conjunction with Plato's comments about writing, our route to Homer seems muddled by yet another enigma. If we add to this that the subject matter of Homer's poetry—mythology—is considered by us to be “false,” while first philosophy is an attempt to communicate truth from within the Homeric tradition, we have another riddle constitutive of the “origin” of Western philosophy and truth.

For scholars acutely sensitive to the possible differences between speech and writing, the appearance of writing marks a sea change in the communicative strategies and purposes of the ancient Greeks. While writing does not appear fully formed, as does Athena from the head of Zeus, its material fact marks the beginning of what Eric Havelock terms a “literate revolution.”²⁷ At least as significant as the Copernican Revolution to the history of science, the literate revolution forever changes not only how we communicate but why we do so as there are material and conceptual practices and consequences mutually exclusive to speaking and writing. For instance, while speech privileges the concrete and the particular moment, writing lends itself to a type of “self-objectification,” i.e., writing or “inscription” fixes language as an object to be studied and returned to again and again.²⁸ In this way, while “the spoken word is invisible and disappears with the breath that carries it,”²⁹ writing not only makes the invisible visible, it fixes or freezes “the breath that carries it” into words and phrases that remain immutable and changeless, as it were, “objectified.” Perhaps it is the emerging objective character of language that encourages or makes possible concepts like Being, One, and Form, i.e., the “high matters” Plato mentions.

Then again, while the differences we think obtain between speech and writing might be in part due to Plato's legacy, these are differences made possible only *in hindsight* of writing. The central task of this chapter, then, is to determine whether Plato's indictment of writing obtains for writing prior to his own, and thereby whether our only route to Homer is through the distinction between speech and writing, orality and literacy, or even myth and philosophy. My assertion is that if it is not the case that our usual categories should hold for Homer, then our usual ways of understanding Homer and his epics

need to be reconsidered. A reconsideration of Homer, moreover, demands a reconsideration of the poet-philosophers who compose within what we understand as the “Homeric tradition.”

Sometime during the eighth century before the Common Era writing appears in the otherwise nonliterate practices of *Magna Graecia*.³⁰ Writing is an inscription on a ceremonial cup, or letters chiseled into victory monument immortalizing the athlete’s surname, township, and prize event. In the seventh century, writing is a signature at the base of statuary and, sometime between the ninth and fifth centuries, writing is a means of transcribing Homer’s epics. Orally composed between the twelfth and the eighth centuries, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are, at some point, written down.³¹ Whether the initial transcription of the epics appears in fragments or as complete texts, all agree that from the “dark ages” of prehistory writing emerges, and of its most magnificent gifts are the epics of Homer.

The material character of this first writing, however, is significantly different from our own writing because first writing does not conform to any visual rules of grammar and punctuation: there are no capital letters, periods, commas, semicolons, paragraph breaks, indentations, or hyphens. Rather, printing begins at the furthest reach of the scroll and continues straight, or relatively straight, across and it matters not whether the “thought” or “phrase” or “word” or even “syllable” is complete on a line, the printing breaks off at the furthest “margin.”³² First writing, then, does not seem to obey any of the conventions by which we learn to write nor by which we learn to read. Consider that faced with a comparably massive rolled scroll completely covered in something resembling block letters, first readers can identify the chaotic jumble of alphabetic marks only in terms of their sound. That is, first reading is an activity of translating from acoustic memory the rhythm and sense of the visible “lines.” In this way, first reading must—from the outset—involve learning how to “see” sound. This difference is significant, for while we are taught that the letter “a” sounds like “ae” or “aw,” first readers are taught that the sound “ae” looks like “a,” etc.

In this way, the material character of first writing alerts us to the fact that it is actually the audible character and quality of speech that makes the developing technology of writing and reading possible and

intelligible.³³ That is, what writing makes visible or initially “objectifies” is a system of sound. The writing of Homer, then, captures the voice of Homer and yet without some acoustic memory of how this voice sounds, the language of the scrolls is unintelligible. In archaic Greece, there is simply no way to make sense of writing without sound.

Since the epics as written preserve the epics as spoken, questions about Homer’s “authorship” are more appropriately phrased as questions about the significance of Homeric speech in ancient Greek culture. In general, however, the significance of Homer is explained in one of two ways. Either (1) a poet named Homer “impressed [the tradition] so strongly with his individual art” that succeeding poets, in memory of his influence, attributed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to him, and this attribution remains through their transcription, or (2) a poet named Homer is directly responsible for the “final and definitive version” of the epics, the version that was eventually written down.³⁴

Whether one thinks the name “Homer” is honorific or—in fact—a literate term of art depends upon when or where one positions Homer in relation to the archaic Greek oral tradition. While some consider Homer’s epics to be the “culmination” of the art of oral poetry,³⁵ others look to Homer as evidence of the Greek oral tradition. Still others consider Homer to exemplify the transition from a culture of speaking and toward a culture of writing, i.e., Homer is an oral poet who is nevertheless preserved in written form.³⁶ These three alternative positions mark three possible routes to determining the place of Homer in ancient Greek culture. Common to all alternatives, however, is the material fact that the data we collect and collate about Homer and his art are textualized. By “textualized” I mean that the allusions to Homer throughout classical antiquity as well as the epics and poems attributed to him by name are accessible to us because they are preserved in written rather than spoken form. On one hand, it is obvious that the name “Homer” and the title *Iliad* and *Odyssey* mean something to us because at some point the epics were written down. Indeed, this fact suggests to many classical scholars that some type of formal literate practice is emerging in and around the time of “Homer.” If this is the case, then it is possible that writing plays some part or has some effect on the significance accorded to Homer, his art, and its position or function in archaic Greece.³⁷ On the other

hand, while scholars recognize the possible effects writing might have had on the first “text” of the epics, Homer’s poetry continues to be translated, anthologized, and studied as an exemplar of the oral tradition. That is, Homer is considered to be the “original” or “archetypal” oral poet and so Homer’s epics provide us with a starting point for all discussion of archaic Greek oral poetry.

To some, this situation suggests a paradox confronting any study of the significance of Homer and the poetry attributed to him: our primary source for the archaic Greek oral tradition is not oral but written. Eric Havelock writes that with the Homeric epics we have “poems we can read in documented form, the first ‘literature’ of Europe; which, however, constitutes the first complete record of ‘orality,’ that is non-literature.”³⁸ Moreover, part of the difficulty in locating Homer against an evolving technology of writing is compounded by doubts regarding our ability to understand the significance of oral poetry with the hindsight we have acquired in a firmly established culture of writing. As Havelock observes, attempts to understand pre- or nonliterate practices “require[s] us to employ literate metaphors for a nonliterate process. Terms like ‘theme,’ ‘structure,’ ‘pattern,’ ‘program,’ and ‘composition’ imply that language is being arranged visually rather than acoustically, and even touched and handled on the page.”³⁹ Havelock’s point is well taken: while writing stimulates our visual and tactile sensibilities, the spoken word stimulates our acoustical and musical sensibilities. Are we still able to hear the acoustical and musical as it was once heard? Without referring to a text we might hear the alliterative element in the following: “And how can we ignore, assembled to celebrate/Quite simply the singing absence of the poet.”⁴⁰ Upon hearing this, however, do we not automatically visualize the recurrence of the consonant “s” and the soft “c” and in so doing do we not also automatically visualize the sounds into a linear pattern, as it were a line upon a page? We cannot assume, however, that prior to the advent of writing the visual and tactile senses were affected in identical or even similar ways. Archaic poets and audiences do not see letters in the shape of words, words in the form of sentences, and sentences arranged silently on a page. For them,—at least visible—letters, sentences, and pages do not exist. Although oral poetry evokes images, it is an image and not a word,

a letter, or anything resembling a linguistic unit that poet and audience see. This distinction is also significant for there is a difference between seeing an image as suggested by words and seeing an image as suggested by sounds.⁴¹ Lacking in the latter is the medium of what we call the “word.” Without recourse to words, *per se*, a nonliterate poet and audience are in a very different communicative situation than one with which we—as literate—are familiar.

Moreover, we might also consider that our versions of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are informed by and translated through highly developed literate practices. Whether Homer is the last in a line of oral poets or first in a line of oral-literate poets, the fact remains that our reception of Homer is initially a literate one. The poetry attributed to Homer is transmitted to us in the form of books; these books are categorized, marketed, shelved, and read according to the types of writing contained within them, and it is in accordance to these “types” that our initial impressions and thoughts about Homer begin to take shape.

Our disposition to and reception of Homer, then, is complicated—perhaps compromised—by a basic set of differences we understand to obtain between speaking and writing, orality and literacy, and mythology and other categories of arts and sciences.⁴² And so one route to Homer is to accept that the archaic Greek oral tradition is—as a whole—lost to us because its media disappear with the breath of the poets who sustain it.⁴³ Studies of contemporary oral traditions, such as those conducted in the Balkans, might help us understand some of the elements and the cultural significance of oral traditions in general, but what we can derive from these studies might fall short of, or be off the mark from, the communicative practices of an archaic Greek oral tradition.⁴⁴ Thereby, although from the outset we must admit we will never fully comprehend the Greek oral tradition, we can continue to study and contrast what we think we know about this tradition with other oral traditions. This route can lead—and has led—to analyses of the “themes,” “patterns,” and structures that constitute what we call “mythology.”

An alternate route to Homer is to candidly admit to a real distinction between speaking and writing, such as we might infer from Plato. Once admitted, we can attempt to extricate the oral from the written elements of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In this way, when certain literate

elements and techniques are identified and isolated, an oral style can emerge for study and discussion. This route is, of course, committed to the assumption that there is a real discrepancy between archaic oral and literate techniques and practices. But a poet like Homer whom *we view* as historically positioned between orality and literacy might not recognize such a discrepancy. Thus, our assumption that such a discrepancy can be identified, articulated, and then extricated from ancient texts begs the very question about the intersections, or lack thereof, between speech and writing in ancient texts.

These choices with regard to Homer seem to reduce to (1) admitting that our literate biases ban us from truly understanding the Greek oral tradition, or (2) as long as we are cognizant of these biases we can identify and separate out the literate elements of transcription from the oral. Neither route is sufficient, however, because both presuppose something akin to Plato's or our own assumptions about communicative differences and purposes between speech and writing. A third and more viable route is to collapse the material fact of the epics to the historical and cultural facts of emerging literacy. In this way, Homer is neither oral nor literate, but something in between. Perhaps Homer is preliterate or protoliterate, as some maintain. If we orient ourselves to Homer's epics as a hybrid communicative system we can avoid imposing the Scylla and Charbydis of orality v. literacy, or speech v. writing, upon texts prior to Plato's and our own, yet still attempt to understand these texts in full admission of the differences that *might* obtain between our own highly developed literate practices and their nonliterate beginnings.⁴⁵

This third route is incomplete, however, unless it includes consideration that the significance of "Homer" in an archaic Greek oral culture could represent a very different disposition to and experience of language. That is, simply because we cannot forget Plato's comments nor the pervasiveness of our own literate phenomenology does not mean we cannot question both as they pertain to first writing, writers, and audiences. Often lost in our translation from writing to speaking, or conversely, are the actual speakers and writers. Of actual speakers, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* present us with images of how a bard performs, and these images suggest that the bard's relationship and conversation with his audience is key to poetic performance in a

number of ways. First, that a bard is not accorded credit for how or what he sings is a vital element in oral poetry. That is, a Homeric bard is not an “author” in any sense of this term: “the words come to him through the Muse; she is the one who fills him with song.”⁴⁶ The song of the poet, then, indicates the possibility of a relationship between the Muses and the villagers, or between immortals and mortals. A bard who, like the *Iliad*’s Thamyris, boasts that he can sing more beautifully than the Muses violates the possibility of this relationship and so—as we are told—Thamyris is struck blind and dumb. Contrary to what we might initially assume, this is not a simple matter of a Muse abandoning or punishing a would-be poet.⁴⁷ Rather, Thamyris is not a poet at all: he boasts that he can manipulate the language and materials of an oral tradition to lift his voice, singular, in a place and time preserved for public pronouncement of the voices of the gods. While we might call this blasphemy, it is more likely Homer’s audience would call it ἰδιότης, or idiocy, meaning “one’s own.” What is one’s own simply does not fit the public character of poetic performance.

Second, the lesson of Thamyris reminds us that this public character is also vital to Homeric poetic performance, so much so Hermann Frankel maintains that poetic recitation is meant to “preserve the social character of a free conversation.”⁴⁸ Reading from *Odyssey*, Book 8, Frankel notes that “after a short piece, the singer broke off and during the interruption the listeners poured and drank their wine and spoke with one another and with the singer” (12). The *Odyssey* also shows us that during such pauses the listeners put questions to the singer concerning the relation of other events to the events just sung, or questions concerning the relationship and conduct of characters, e.g., “Where was Menelaus when this occurred?” or “Did Aegisthus behave honorably?”⁴⁹ According to Frankel, when the performance resumes, often the next evening, the singer might pose a question to the audience, or he “might direct [questions] to the Muse” (13). In this way, an oral performance proceeds by “fits and starts” and the same material might be sung and discussed for weeks. This conversational aspect of poetic performance, then, actually disrupts the sequence of the narrative. In this light, the lack of smooth, narrative transition between the events (or “episodes”) of

both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—in their written form—can be interpreted as textual evidence for the ebb and flow of poetic performance rather than, as some would have it, incompetence in narrative transition due to pre- or protoliterate skills.

Third, Frankel's analysis—to an extent—complements Gregory Nagy's suggestions that a key component in oral poetry is its "performance." Nagy writes that in oral poetry "composition and performance are in varying degrees aspects of one process."⁵⁰ By this Nagy means that an orally "composed" poem is not first composed and then recited—as would be a written text—but that an oral poem is "composed" as it is being performed. To quote Albert Bates Lord: "An oral poem is composed not *for* but *in* performance."⁵¹ With this in mind, it is easier to understand Frankel's claim that "[e]very epic singer freely took over the work of his predecessors and used it as he wished" or, at least, it is easier to understand how every epic singer *could* use the work of his predecessors as he wished.⁵² This suggests not only that each "composition" may be unique to each "performance," and *vice versa*, but also that the composition and performance of oral poetry might be better described as an "event," or a "happening," rather than as a "recitation."

Fourth, the "work" Frankel refers to constitute the elements and mechanics of "oral verse making." According to Milman Parry, the key component in "oral verse making" is the "formula," and Parry defines formula "as a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express an essential idea."⁵³ By "same metrical conditions" Parry means that each formula functions as a "piece" or "bit" of hexameter verse. As a "bit" of hexameter verse, formula are not designed to fit *into* hexameter verse as we might say an item fits into a box. By "fit" *we mean* that the item must be of a certain length, width, and depth, etc. Rather, formula *are* hexameter verse, and so composing and performing with formula is more like lining up boxes of the same dimension: the contents of the box (formula) and the dimensions of the box (hexameter verse) are indistinguishable.

Parry also explains that that each formula is "made in view of the other formulas with which it is to be joined; and the formulas taken all together make up a diction which is the material for a completely

unified technique of oral verse making" (272). This "diction" is "made up of words and forms" from Ionic, Aeolic, and Arcado-Cyprian dialects, but also from "artificial forms which could never have existed in the speech of any people" (315). Moreover, within an oral tradition, formulaic diction "evolves" to the extent that over time foreign and older phrase forms might disappear, or become adopted or adapted to "a language that would suit the hexameter" (315). I take Parry to mean that while formulaic diction can be adapted from native speech, some formula are specific to oral versemaking and thereby have neither precedent nor complement in any dialect. Further, the evolution of formula is specific to each generation of oral poets, those who adopt or adapt the formulaic diction of their predecessors. In this way, formulaic diction, as a mixture of native and artificial speech, is specific to an oral poetic language and an oral poetic language, as it evolves, is specific to a particular oral tradition. There does not seem to exist, then, something like a universal or original formula, the meaning of which is transcultural or from which other formula derive.

Up until this point, then, the image of a Homeric bard includes his authorless status which reinforces every poetic performance as a public event that encourages rather than discourages the participation of the audience. Moreover, the event itself is supported by a tradition that persists in oral form for at least half a millennia—*muthos*, composed *as* performed in the verbal rhythm of a specific formulaic diction. Oral versemaking, thereby, differs significantly from literate composition and recitation. Literate poets, or poets experimenting with writing, are afforded a leisure that oral poets are not. Parry explains: "... without writing the poet can make his verses only if he has a formulaic diction which will give him his phrases all made, and made in such a way that, at the slightest bidding of *the poet*, they will link themselves in an unbroken pattern that will fill his verses and make his sentences" (316–17, emphasis mine).⁵⁴ An oral poet cannot, as it were, sit back and reflect upon the "next" and most fitting word or phrase to round out *his* thought *and* coincide with the established audible pattern of his verse. Such reflection would create a contemplative or artistic "pause" that the oral poet's audience—it stands to reason—neither desires nor shares; rather, according to Parry, the oral poet must have at his disposal a poetic language comprised

of a plethora of formulas, some of which are interchangeable in terms of the “essential idea” expressed.⁵⁵

To Parry and others, the “essential idea” is expressed in terms of the exigencies of the tale, and often there exists a variety of formula to express the same “essential idea.” For example, throughout the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the phrase we translate as “but then he (we, they) had done so and so,” is sung forty-one times in nineteen different ways. Each of these different ways, moreover, can be understood as variations of one another.⁵⁶ While there is no essential formula, only a family of formula, there is, according to Parry and others, an essential idea which the variations express. According to Seth Schein, “the recurrent line ‘But when the young dawn showed again her rosy fingers’ [expresses] the essential idea ‘When it was morning.’”⁵⁷ Hence, formula that express ‘when it was morning’ are formula that express the same “essential idea.”

Yet over time—since formula evolve—formula are adapted, adopted, or abandoned and it is the difference between the inclusion and exclusion of formula that Parry says indicates the particular artistry of an oral poet. Oral poetic artistry, Parry writes, belongs to “the poets who made [formula] and [to] the poets who kept them” (272). I understand Parry to mean that the artistry of “Homer” does not consist in how or whether a poet or group of poets transcribed the “definitive version” of the epics. Rather the art of the written epics is evident by the formula included in them. Yet each formula included in the written epics also stands in some relation to formula not included. That is: “[The] repeated use of a phrase means not only that the poet is following a fixed pattern of words, it means equally that he is denying himself all other ways of expressing the idea” (279); hence, the artistry of “Homer” bears upon the formula he either makes or keeps. In the written epics, while some formula are specific to either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, and of these some are used sparingly and others more often, between the epics some formula are repeated up to forty-eight times.⁵⁸ Parry concludes from this that some of the “Homeric formula” might indicate an “economy” or “thrift” of formulaic expression that is *not evident* in written compositions (312).

By an “economy” or “thrift,” I take Parry to mean that while oral composition is certainly more repetitive than literate composition, it is so—or is able to be so—because of the force of essential ideas.

Although some scholars in the footsteps of Parry have criticized him for focusing exclusively on noun epithet formulas, these formula best express the essential idea to which Parry refers. One such formula, that we translate “swift-footed Achilles,” is used to describe or portray Achilles whether he is engaging in combat or sitting still. Likewise, the phrase “seafaring ships” is used to portray an embarking voyage or a fleet drawn upon the shore.⁵⁹ To the contemporary ear and eye, such phrasing seems to be inconsistent. We might describe the ships as still, or Achilles as resting, but we would never use the phrase “seafaring” to describe ships on the shore, or “swift-footed” to indicate a sleeping Achilles. It is possible, however, that the oral poet is not so constrained by what we would consider an appropriate correspondence between formula and narrative detail, or “word” and “object.” Rather, the phrase “swift-footed Achilles” expresses “. . . the permanent beside the momentary and temper(s) . . . the accidental with the essential” (34). In this way, Achilles, whether sitting or fighting or running or dreaming, is described as essentially “swift-footed” and this essential or permanent characteristic differentiates him from other characters: the epithet “swift-footed” invokes the lineage or heritage of Zeus—i.e., Achilles is not only nearer to the gods than ordinary mortals, he is nearer to one god than others. But the phrase “swift-footed” also embraces the symbolic relationships that obtain for an entire network of characters and tales. While we might refer to these epithets as no more or less than an allegorical convention or a literary typology (e.g., all young heroes and women are blonde, all older men are dark haired), such “types” are articulated regularly and consistently not only in respect of persons but also things. A ship is a “vessel(s) for travel over the pathless sea” regardless of whether this particular ship is so traveling or not. And the heroic Achilles is “swift and stormy” by nature regardless of how he appears in a particular tale or event. In this way, formula “signify the unalterable nature of things and the outstanding traits of persons” (34).

This image of Achilles as swift-footed or dark and stormy, then, actually transcends the narrative exigencies of any particular tale, and this holds true *regardless* of whether a tale is written and recited or orally composed as a poetic performance. The transcendent function of formula is important to keep in mind because Parry’s

concept of economy or thrift actually illustrates a reading back from writing how oral poetry *must work* within the parameters of our understanding of memory, i.e., there must be a way of economizing formula, of reducing its abundance to a stable, unified, manageable system. But since formula are not constrained by specific narrative detail there would not seem to be a need for “thrift.” Moreover, since some formula are not reducible to native speech and all formula evolve, both idiomatic and artificial formula are changeable. This changeable character of formula is crucial to maintaining the spontaneous and authorless nature of oral poetry. And so, given the character of poetic performance—that it is authorless, spontaneous, public, and participatory—it is more than likely that both prior to and for a long while following the written version of the epics there exists no definitive version of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. To assume so is to strip the spontaneous, authorless, public, and participatory elements from poetic performance. But if one strips these elements from the image of how a Homeric bard sings, one is not left with insight into oral poetic performance but with something resembling a performance *of* oral poetry. This distinction is significant because just as there is a difference between reading a poem aloud and reciting a poem from memory, there is a difference between performing what one has memorized—as in lines from a script—and spontaneously improvising a collection of tales for which there is no script—only the breath of the Muse.

In this way, what we do know of the artistry of oral versemaking does not actually allow us to infer much of what constitutes common knowledge of the Homeric tradition. First, Homer cannot be an oral poet who impresses the oral tradition so much succeeding generations of poets attribute the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to him because *as oral poetry* neither poem is appropriately attributed to anyone. It does not stand to reason that the authorless character of oral poetry would be suddenly swept aside in a tide of transcription unless one also assumes writing sweeps aside speech. But this is something Plato’s post Homeric reservations about writing actually will not allow. Second, Homer cannot be directly responsible for the final version of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the version that was “written down.” For if it is true that epic singers “freely took over the works of their predecessors” and it

is also true that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* possess many inaccuracies and omissions, why would the epic singers after Homer not improvise and emend some of these omissions? It is more puzzling to assume they did not do so than that they preserved the tales out of enduring respect, faulty as the tales might be.

It is also difficult to justify Homer's poetry as the "culmination" of the oral tradition, e.g. Homer is last in a long line of oral poets. If this were the case, the oral tradition would somehow cease to exist *as oral* once a version of the epics is transcribed. But this presupposes either a wide dissemination of written texts or the memorization of a central—or a few central—text(s) that are then performed as verbatim recitations rather than versemaking. Neither alternative seems plausible given the material character of first writing and reading as physically arduous and tedious, i.e., neither easily achieved nor duplicated. Nor must we suppose the oral quality of oral poetry is completely lost in transcription or that the texts *as texts* represent a transition from orality to literacy. We, and to a much lesser extent Plato, live in hindsight of this transition. Plato's indictment of writing can serve to alert us to our own basic assumptions about the relationships between speech, writing, and truth, and cause us to question whether and how these assumptions ill fit communicative practices that are historically—*if not also logically*—prior to literacy.

In the main, my objections to our usual ways of understanding Homer are meant to show how our literate experiences can encourage us to assume that the material fact of first writing forces an epistemological—some say metaphysical—rift into the fabric of the oral tradition. But this is, of course, to impose our understanding of epistemology and metaphysics upon the archaic Greeks. Even if this were appropriate, since the written history of philosophy comprises alternative—perhaps competing—accounts of epistemological and metaphysical truths, all routes back to Homer presuppose some type of literate, philosophic commitment. In this way, our experience can obstruct the possibility that what we call the oral tradition represents a very different way of being in the world, and thereby a commitment to that world that we must *try* to understand as best we can *in its own terms*, i.e., neither Plato's nor our own.⁶⁰

We do know and are able to warrant some characteristics of how oral poetry works. We know, for instance, that in oral versemaking formula are composed to fit seamlessly beside one another, and so there might be one or many formula per “line” of verse.⁶¹ Indeed, Frankel points out that within the Homeric epics, the final portion of verse, specifically the final third, is replete with formulaic expression. In this way, formula not only sustain the audible fluidity of sung poetry, they heighten its effect upon singer and audience alike, maintaining a reciprocal relationship between “the rhythm of the verse and the rhythm of the meaning.”⁶² Hence, the regularity and consistency of sound in oral poetry “harmonizes” with the regularity and consistency of the “sense” or meaning of oral poetry.

But Frankel also maintains that achieving this harmony constitutes a major problem in the art of hexameter composition: “whether and how the natural sense articulation *of the text* should come to terms with the prescribed succession of longs and shorts in versification” (31, emphasis mine). He identifies this “problem” as if the rhythm of verse must somehow be applied to a text that is static and unrhythmic. Yet where are these “texts” to which the rhythm of sound must be applied? While Frankel suggests that for the oral poet the content of his song is *as important* as how his song sounds, Frankel’s suggestion seems to presuppose an original separation of sound from sense. But such a distinction is questionable in the context of an oral tradition. For unlike a literate singer and audience, the oral poet and his listeners cannot generalize a significant difference between the meaning of “words” and how these “words” sound. Indeed, how could they recognize a difference between the sound of an “x” and the meaning of “x” in the absence of a medium that abstracts “x” from its sound? It is more plausible to consider that in hexameter verse “sound and sense” are mutually inclusive and thereby inseparable. Although some literate poets attempt to traverse the bridge of sound and sense, it is an attempt made in hindsight of a certain disposition toward, and experience of, language that has, over the centuries, actually built that bridge between the sound of a word and a word’s meaning.⁶³ But within an oral tradition it stands to reason that what we call “linguistic units,” be they letters, syllables, words, or phrases,

will signify nothing in themselves if they are not heard. For in the absence of writing the only access to meaning is sound.⁶⁴

For the archaic Greeks, then, oral verse-making is primarily a system of sound. It is the sound of the epics that makes their transcription possible and it is the rhythm of this sound that allowed for the “discovery” of formula in the first place and continues to inspire translators: “Throughout the period of composing the translation as poetry on the page, I continued reciting it to audiences, voicing the text as I crafted it and crafting it to capture the voice that I heard.”⁶⁵ When Parry and others refer to an “essential idea” that marks a family resemblance among formula, we need to remember that for the Homeric Greeks this is an idea communicated not in a proposition but *as* song. Further, since formula evolve there are no universal nor essential formula from which a family of formula descends. To assume there could ever be something like an oral definitive version of the epics is to impose the rigidity of text upon the artistry of oral poetry. And this would be to further assume that an Homeric essential idea is akin to the “briefest of formulas” Plato mentions—those unalterable truths that constitute the “high matters” of knowledge. To this extent we might say that the “essential idea” of Achilles is like the “immutable truths” about Achilles—the “permanent,” the “essential,” the unchanging, self-same property of or about Achilles. But while formula might transcend the exigencies of a particular tale, all formula are circumscribed by the collection of tales Aristotle calls *muthos*, and *muthos* is a system of sound. If a poet, or a poet-philosopher, wishes to rupture the sense of an “Homeric” narrative, he must do so through sound.⁶⁶

Chapter 2

Homeric or “Sung Speech”

The type of intelligence that makes writing and reading, and perhaps also philosophy as we recognize it, possible may not be an emerging scientific “consciousness” or a mysterious awakening of rationality. Rather, the particular attribute of archaic Greek intelligence may be the ability to remember and recall the verbal rhythm of speech. The ability to remember and recall is, of course, an activity of memory. Throughout classical Greece, it is a speaker’s memory that distinguishes him as educated and intelligent.⁶⁷ The particular content of memory for early Greeks, however, is not a series of words as much as it is a rhythm of sound. Initially, a written Homer preserves the sound of Homer, and it is actually the ability to recall the sound of Homer that confers intelligibility upon an alphabetized Homer. What a Homeric poet commits to memory, then, is an audible—not visual—rhythm.⁶⁸ In this way, the contents of poetic memory are not “visible” words *per se* but sounds, and these sounds are made by regulating the modulations of the voice. It is not surprising, then, that in the ancient world the voice is considered to be and is treated as a physical organ and instrument. Just as the entire body can be trained to move, or to walk, or to stand in a manner that is *orthos*, upright and befitting a “gentleman,” so too the voice can be trained to “speak.”⁶⁹ And for close to a millenia, the standard for virtuous or excellent speech, that which is used to regulate and train the voice, is epical *sounding* speech.

This is the type of regulation or “training” that Jean-Pierre Vernant alludes to when he suggests that *what passes* for poetic inspiration is antedated by years of artistic training consisting of memory exercises.⁷⁰ It is important to be clear, however, about *what* a poet memorizes. As literate, we tend to focus on the linguistic content of these

exercises—the words or word phrases. In this way, some scholars suggest that the infamous catalog of ships as well as the sheer proportions of the epics could not have been realized without access to written notes. This idea—that a *primarily nonnarrative* catalog is not so easily memorized as, say, the epithets of heroes and gods—rests upon the assumption that the catalog must have been memorized in some written form and then patterned into formulaic speech because the length of the list, as well as the volume of the tales, is just too difficult to memorize otherwise. Where passages *display* catalogs or lists we assume the need for memory exercises originating from written text or “notes.”⁷¹ And so, the inclusion of catalogs and lists in oral poetry might point to a first break in the tradition that privileges sound before sight. That is, in order to memorize such a list the bard does not first appeal to an acoustic memory of verbal rhythm. Rather, the bard first memorizes the nonrhythmic information and then, having *stored such data*, pieces the information into dactylic hexameter, *transposing*, as it were, words into sound rather than sound into words.

This idea, however, presupposes two interrelated issues. First, the assumption that the sheer size of the epics or a plethora of nonnarrative information within the epics demonstrates the need for, or influence of, writing suggests that an Homeric bard is capable of reading; that he somehow abstracts words and phrases from text in order to resound the information in terms suited to epic meter. This would imply that part of a bard’s training includes reading and that there are enough of these written notes to spare in the expanse of *Magna Graecia*. Given the scarcity of texts in the ancient world, however, neither of these situations is likely. At best we *can* imagine a bard trained to translate the rhythm of native speech to epic speech, but this task does not require writing as it does require a rhythmic modulation of voice.

Second, assuming the sheer size of the epics and length of lists within them demonstrates literate strategies or techniques sidesteps the tremendous cultural significance of memory in ancient Greece. For instance, some scholars suggest that to the poet’s memory is accorded a great portion of intelligence and because of this a poet is also accorded an even greater portion of social and political prestige than the average citizen.⁷² In this way, the apparent high social

standing of a bard illustrates a reciprocal relationship between intelligence, social status, and power and this relationship is supported by a system of beliefs that prizes, above all other types of speech, the particular art of the poet, oral versemaking.

Even though a Homeric poet is not credited for what he sings, he is the recipient of the breath of the Muse. The poet, then, is not just any other member of the *hoi polloi*: he is nearer to the gods than others because his is the voice through whom the Muses sing. And so some scholars assert that the Homeric poet is accorded social prestige to the extent that—generation after generation—being unlike everyone else because of his art he becomes better than everyone else because of his gift—divine speech. Like a prophet or a king, a poet is, what Marcel Detienne calls, a "master of truth": his words proclaim and pronounce rather than guide and suggest. Since poet-philosophers like Xenophanes and Parmenides compose within the Homeric tradition, they too perform from a position a bit above the crowd: they are the *hoi sophoi*, the wise ones, whose proclamations lift them beyond the fray in *media res*. Indeed, is it not Xenophanes who claims that he—because of his *Sophia*—is more deserving of honors than—at least—an athlete? Thus is the privileged and often esoteric character of ancient philosophy born: out of the public character of poetic pronouncement comes an aristocratic and increasingly privatized song of secret *Sophia*.⁷³

The scholarly intersection of memory, intelligence, and political power is plausible *if* oral versemaking can be manipulated to an individual's social advantage. But given the elements and mechanics of oral versemaking, it is highly unlikely that this or that poet could successfully manipulate the collection of tales from performance to performance, and generation to generation. Everything put forth about how oral versemaking works precludes this possibility. Even the evolution of formula—its artistry—depends upon a consensus that is not limited to the poets themselves because oral versemaking is a public performance during which the one does not speak to the many as much as the many listen as one to the Muse. A poet would be hard pressed to alter this arrangement and still be considered a poet.

If there is, indeed, social prestige accorded to the poet, and thereby the poet-philosopher, it cannot be explained by appeal to the art of

oral versemaking for there are no means within the art itself to dissolve or disrupt its egalitarian character. Surprisingly this is so because the art of oral versemaking is considered to be a gift, not from mortals to mortals, but from immortals to mortals. Marcel Detienne, for one, writes that memory is indissociable from oral versemaking, what he calls “sung speech,” and that both are manifestations of a primarily religious power.⁷⁴ It is worth exploring what Detienne calls the “religious” character of sung speech because—whether we accept its terms or not—in archaic Greece sung speech is speech of the gods.

Detienne explains that the Greek pantheon includes a myriad of deities who simultaneously reflect and stimulate human feelings, emotions, passions, mental capacities and failings. Although there is, undoubtedly, an anthropomorphic element to the Greek pantheon, we should not read into this the simple “anthropomorphism” that often characterizes Homeric “religion.” The archaic Greek term *mousa*, for instance, can be understood as the common noun for rhythmic or sung speech and a name for a divine power that inspires such speech—the Muse. The presence of the Muse, like the presence of other deities, can be felt among humans although such a presence has its source, and indeed abides, in an autonomous and immortal realm—the world of the gods. Likewise, if we consider that the nouns *metis* and *themis* are both proper names for two wives of Zeus—Metis and Themis—as well as common nouns that refer respectively to an intellectual faculty and a social concept, the significance of the pantheon to archaic Greek experience becomes apparent.

Although the genealogy of the gods and the order of Zeus’ consorts might be subject to change from poet to poet, the pantheon as a whole exerts a pervasive influence upon Greek oral versemaking. Hesiod is free to invert the genealogical order of some of Zeus’ consorts, and he is even free to introduce new gods and goddesses, but he is not free to deviate from certain identities and attributes of each god, for this would require changing the “name” of the god. As Walter Burkett observes, one peculiar aspect of ancient Greek religion is that the names of the gods appear to be etymologically impenetrable: “Not even for Zeus could the Greeks find a correct etymology.”⁷⁵ This suggests that formulaic expressions for Zeus and other gods are not

culled from native speech but are artificial—formula specific to archaic Greek oral poetry. The literal anthropomorphism we often attribute to the pantheon, then, is actually contradicted by the non-referential character of some formulaic diction. That is, the names of many of the gods have no referent outside sung speech. To root around for an etymology for some names is to assume the referential truth of an anthropomorphism such formula forbid.

Moreover, Zeus’ position within the pantheon was, is, and ever will be distinct. Mario Vegetti explains that while “[w]e have a Zeus of vows, a Zeus of borders, a Zeus protector of suppliants and guests, a Zeus of rainstorms and thunder . . . behind this plurality of functions, however, the figure of the god maintains his unity and individuality.”⁷⁶ The essential sound of Zeus, then, remains constant throughout not just this or that tale, but the entire collection of tales—*muthos*. So, what initially appears to be a reciprocal relationship between the pantheon and human experience—the gods are like us—is perhaps better understood as a type of audible barrier: the so-called “names” of the gods exert boundaries upon what was, is, and will be sung. Even though what is sung can become a matter of conversation, such conversation begins, is sustained, and ends within the boundaries or parameters of the tales, not because there is nothing debatable within such tales—i.e., the tales are not doctrinal or dogmatic—but because the tales themselves make possible what is heard. That is, all the tales, collectively known as *muthos*, constitute the very origin—the *arche*—of speech.

Hence, a Homeric, or even post-Homeric, bard is not free to weave his own story into a collection of songs he did not create in the first place. A Homeric poet is free to resound details within the songs, such as the genealogy of Zeus’ wives, but who is a wife of Zeus remains constant, unchanging—like the immortals. By visual analogy, sung speech acts like the exterior frames of a moving picture. While the contents of the picture—shape, shadow, line, texture—do change, the frame acts as a perimeter *by which it is possible* to organize the content within the frame. In sung speech, the constant authority of the frame, however, is not visible but audible. When one asks “Where was Menelaus when this occurs?” one can begin to feel and wonder at the presence and force of the great expanse of tales; a song of which is being heard now *because* it is a bit or a part of the tales endlessly sung.

Much as each formula is hexameter verse and hexameter verse is *muthos*, each tale is indicative rather than constitutive of *the* tale—*muthos*. Hence, to hear and to speak *muthos* is to actively participate in the sound of the songs endlessly sung—in the sound of the eternal. One participates in the sound of the eternal, so to speak, rather than passively hears. In this way, it is actually the human element of sung speech that reifies the distance from immortal to mortal. That is, the activity of hearing and speaking what is not one's own voice because it is not just one's own native language or dialect alerts hearer and speaker to the presence of another. But when this other is not human *per se*, is not just another audience member and not just a poet but the breath of the Muse, one's position in relation to the divine becomes palpable, at the least.

This unseen but audibly felt presence of the divine is supported by an invocation to the Muse. The possibility of the presence of the Muse is supported by a tale of her origin, the birth of the Muses:

According to a number of legends, when the "Father of All" had completed creation, he asked one of the prophets whether there was anything among all of the things born on earth that the prophet "wished did not exist . . ." The prophet replied "that all things were absolutely perfect and complete, but there was just one thing lacking, laudatory speech (*ton epaineten . . . logon*)"—speech arising from and dedicated for the sole purpose of praising the completion and perfection of creation. Upon hearing the prophet's praise, the "Father of All" approves and *forthwith* brings into being "the lineage of singers full of harmonies, all born from one of the powers by whom the 'Father' was surrounded . . . Memory". (*Mnemosyne*)⁷⁷

Oral versemaking, then, has its source in *divine memory*, and yet it is the divine aspect of memory that is often overlooked in accounts of the significance of the Muses in epic poetry. That is, we believe that immortals do not speak to mortals and so an invocation to a Muse is a literary formality or a poetic convention intended to position and identify a poet as a source of inspiration. In this way, the inspiration the ancient Greeks call "divine" we call "artistic." Hence, invocations to a Muse persist as elements of a literary tradition, some of the works

of William Blake serving as example. Whether an ancient or more modern poet believes he is a recipient of the breath of the divine, we, however, understand his belief is false. As Vernant reminds us, "*what passes* for poetic inspiration is antedated by years of artistic training consisting of memory exercises."

But this interpretation of the communicative practice of an invocation to a Muse can limit and bind our understanding of the ancient Greek oral tradition. To infer that a poet is passing as divinely inspired presupposes knowledge of a poet's true intent, i.e., what it would mean or be to not pass. Yet it is just this knowledge—at the least—that is in question. For already at work in the notion of "passing" is a judgment against the possibility of a mortal relationship to the divine. Thereby, one who invokes the possibility of a relationship that we deem impossible must be pretending, i.e., lying. This judgment, in turn, is supported by the web of beliefs by which we judge *muthos* to be false. That is, since *muthos* is spoken by the Muse, yet no such entity "Muse" exists, archaic poets are lying or deluded about the source of their stories. Hence, the entire collection of tales proceeds from a belief that is false, i.e., *muthos* is fictitious. Such reasoning could be accurate if one can prove the intention of poets to lie. But, again, since poets are not accorded credit for their songs, any intention to manipulate their audience must come back to their motivation for social power. This motivation, however, cannot be warranted on any individual basis. For as long as oral verse-making is considered authorless, it is not just a poet who is divinely inspired but all those who hear the breath of the Muse. Hence, it is not just the pretense of a poet that is under consideration, but the collective memory of an entire community.

Also, often overlooked in attempts to understand the function of the Muse in archaic poetry are assumptions about her purpose. While an invocation to a Muse seems to us to function as a type of performative ritual guaranteeing the presence *of the gods*, an invocation could also be a request, prefiguring the possibility of hearing the divine rather than a guarantee of doing so. That is, an invocation could be an asking; a prayer rather than a demand. The difference is significant: to assume the early Greeks assume they could, as it were, call the gods down violates the ancient cultural norm of *hybris* so well

documented by scholars of the ancient world. Since it is implausible to attribute a type of ritualized *hybris* to any longstanding ancient Greek practice, it is more likely that our understanding of ancient invocations derives from our engagement with a type of instrumental reasoning that the early Greeks might not associate with sung speech. That is, in a post-Hellenic world, perhaps everything we do we do for a purpose or a reason. But as the tale of sung speech makes evident, the Muses come to be to revere Creation. For what possible outcome or consequence is reverence an instrument?

Last, and perhaps most importantly, our biases, modern theist, atheist, or agnostic, lead us to believe that the entire web of beliefs that support an invocation to the Muse is false: again, immortals do not speak to—or through—mortals. And so, what the ancient Greeks believed to be true we now know is false. This claim, however, rests upon the supposition that the ancient Greeks believe their myths in the same way we believe or disbelieve certain facts or fictions. But this supposition imposes an epistemological schema upon a tradition that—according to our own interpretations—is unlike our own. Given that we are attempting to understand a tradition so admittedly unlike our own, we do well to consider that at least some of our judgments presuppose concepts that might ill fit the practice in question. And one of these concepts is “truth.”

As Paul Veyne reminds us, for the ancient Greeks the “myths are authentic historical traditions.”⁷⁸ This might lead us to believe that—indeed—the ancient Greeks believe their myths. But by “historical” I take Veyne to mean not factual names, dates, and places, but rather the “general sense” of “what is said.” Werner Jaeger, among others, observes that *historie* for the ancient Greeks does not consist in the verbatim reproduction of the speeches of important statesmen or the mirroring of significant events. Rather, Thucydides freely admits that unlike his record of external facts he makes each character say what he feels the situation requires or demands. Hence, Thucydides neither invents what is said by someone else, nor transcribes “what is said” word for word, but concerns himself with conveying the general sense. A general sense is neither true nor false, but rather fits a given situation.⁷⁹ In this way, a “general sense” is a nonliteral but appropriate rendering of what happens. Much as certain formula do not conform

to literal narrative detail (i.e., Achilles is swift-footed even when he is asleep) but do conform to the "general sense" of the tales, Thucydides *historie* is more concerned with conveying the essential ideas of what happens, the "internal facts" as it were. A significant difference between *muthos* and *historie*, however, is that *muthos* communicates what everyone knows and what everyone says; hence "what is said" in the most general of a "general sense."

Since *muthos* is "what everyone knows and what everyone says" it cannot be considered false *per se* for *muthos* belongs to everyone, and it is simply impossible to conceive how it is possible for everyone to lie, gratuitously or otherwise, to everyone.⁸⁰ Further, "what is said" cannot be thought to not exist in the sense it is imaginary or "made-up," for what does not exist is nothing, and yet how can anyone and everyone speak of nothing? Moreover, while *muthos* cannot be appropriately considered false, this does not entail that the Greeks consider *muthos* to be true: to ask whether and when the Greeks begin to disbelieve their myths is to presuppose that at some point the Greeks believe their myths. But this is to impose an exclusive disjunction upon a culture that does not recognize, as do we, incompatibility between certain knowledge and fallible belief, truth and falsity, and fact and fiction. And so, as Veyne reminds us, *muthos* for the ancient Greeks is neither true nor false in our "general sense" of these terms. To this extent, ancient Greek *aletheia*—the term we translate "truth"—is primarily that which is not—*a*—forgotten—*lethe*. Since the constituent components of *muthos* are a verbal rhythm that originates in divine memory, oral poetry, more so than any other medium, is the source and mainstay of *aletheia*—what is not or *never* forgotten.⁸¹

Even in the dialogues of Plato, apparently one of the original proponents for an epistemological distinction between knowledge and belief, epical or mythical language is often celebrated and revered as divinely inspired speech.⁸² This suggests that sung speech, with its origin in divine memory, not only contains a "truthful basis," it circumscribes our earliest accounts of "truth." For sung speech reveals and preserves what is not-forgotten just as a mirror simultaneously reflects and holds an image. According to Veyne, epical or mythical knowledge *acts* like a mirror: it "blends with what it reflects so the

medium is not distinguished from the message.”⁸³ And this is to say, once again, that within the communicative practices and purposes of oral versemaking, sound is not distinguished from sense.

What we identify, then, as a conventional invocation to the Muse in the texts of Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Parmenides, and even Empedocles, is actually antedated and supported by a communicative practice that reveres the power of memory: *mousa*, simultaneously the common noun for rhythmic or sung speech and a name for a divine power that inspires such speech—the Muse. In the nominative, *mousa* is synonymous with the Muses, the collective daughters known as “*Memory*.” Detienne explains how each daughter denotes one of the “essential aspects of the poetic function.”⁸⁴ There is, for example, *Clio* (*kleos*) who represents the fame transmitted to future generations of divinely inspired action (41). There is also *Thalia*, who signifies the festivals that provide the social conditions for poetic composition and inspiration. There is *Melete* who denotes the “attention, concentration, and mental exercise” necessary to bards and apprentices alike, as well as *Mneme* who “names the psychological function enabling recitation and improvisation,” and finally *Anoide* who denotes the product, the completed poem of her sisters *Melete* and *Mneme* (41). Although the many faces of memory evolve and change in ancient sources,⁸⁵ the divine family of Memory reflects and sustains all aspects of poetic function. In this way, Detienne suggests that Memory serves not only as the material basis of sung speech, it also, and importantly, “gave to poetic pronouncements their status of magicoreligious speech” or “efficacious speech”—speech that makes real “what is said” (43).

The efficacious character of sung speech is best understood in terms of its divine origin. For, according to the tale, the institution of “sung speech” is immediate: Zeus approves the prophet’s praise and—immediately—the Muses are born. Although we might read this as testifying to the omnipotence of the “Father of All,” it is important to note that the prophet’s speech is a form of “laudatory speech.” It is because the prophet’s speech is a form of praise that his words are realized (*krainein*).⁸⁶ The origin of sung speech, then, is intimately associated with praise and praise is life sustaining speech. Unless the speech of the prophet—that all things are absolutely perfect and

complete"—develops and grows it is speech that signifies nothing, falling stillborn from the prophet's lips. Speech which does not take root, however, which does not nurture what is best and most excellent, and which does not like a shoot "grow and expand in stature" (72), is not praise at all, but something blameworthy, insignificant, and eventually withering to oblivion, i.e., forgetfulness.⁸⁷

Detienne also explains that in archaic Greece there is an intimate connection between speech, praise, and glory—that which is also not-forgotten. A hymn of praise is meant literally to take root and grow: "Like a tree fed by fresh dews, virtue soars into the air, raised among the good and the just toward the shimmering ether."⁸⁸ Laudatory speech, then, is not meant to describe or represent an image of a natural process, rather "speech is truly conceived as natural reality, a part of *physis*" (72). And so it is very significant that it is a prophet who *first* praises what is all perfect and complete in creation. For if the prophet's praise is not realized (*krainen*), then not only has the prophet not praised the creation of the "Father," for this is a praise that does not nurture its object—the world—the prophet is also not a prophet, but a vain chatterer whose words "fall to the ground with no result" (74). Rather, by praising creation the prophet *foretells* the continuation of creation: praise generating life generating praise. And so as we are told Zeus approves and immediately the prophet's praise is made real: "a lineage of singers full of harmonies" themselves echoing the prophet's praise with a divine praise. This is *Mousa*, the speech of praise; it is a gift of the gods that, like nature, "was, is, and ever will be."

Certainly not all scholars and philosophers will agree with Veyne's account of myth as neither true nor false or Detienne's account of sung speech as efficacious. More traditional accounts of *muthos* and formulaic language tend to interpret the epical gods and heroes as "characters" endlessly engaging the narrative structures that give archaic Greek life meaning, or—bracketing the question of the believability of the epics—attempt to understand how the tales promote that peculiarly ancient Greek familiarity with the divine. Still, whether one concludes that the myths are simply meaningful stories or in fact signify a more "authentic" way of being "religious," the pervasive presence of *muthos* in ancient culture offers us insight to the

dispositions and experiences of speakers who, in great part, understand themselves and their surroundings in the terms of *muthos*. It is because myth is so pervasive that I suggest Veyne's and Detienne's accounts are particularly astute. For it is quite possible that when we ask "What do the myths mean?" or even "How does *muthos* function in ancient Greece?" we summarily impose a conceptual separation between a text and its 'meaning.' But this is, of course, to presuppose that the medium—sung speech—is separable from its message—the meaning of sung speech. Yet, until the epics are completely written down and these written texts are disseminated widely across *Magna Graecia* there is no possibility for the sense or message of the tales to be considered separate from their sound. Our willingness, as it were, to consider the meaning of myth separate from its materials, as if meaning is its own entity, indicates a different facility with language: a literate facility, encompassing the ability to read over and between the lines, pause, reflect, reconsider, compare text to text, and—if appropriate—*take out of context*. As valuable as this facility is within our own culture, it distorts rather than illuminates the "texts" of nonliterate cultures.

The "terrible beauty" of Veyne's and Detienne's analyses, then, is that it requires us to reconsider some of our most basic assumptions about what constitutes an appropriate interpretation of an ancient text. Moreover, a reconsideration of our most basic assumptions often leads to the need for new answers in light of old questions, such as: If it is inappropriate to consider that a poet is only pretending divine inspiration for his own social or political advantage, how is it appropriate to understand the role of the poet in ancient Greece? If it is inappropriate to impose our epistemology—our way of thinking—upon a culture clearly unlike our own, what can we come to know of the "general sense" of ancient Greek experience that holds any relevance to our own experience? And—importantly—what of our first philosophers; those apparently on a "quest" for truth but composing in a tradition within which "truth"—as we understand it—does not exist?

To the last question, Eric Havelock, among others, suggests that one of the results of emerging literacy is *philosophia*. That is, in order for concepts such as the One, or the One God, to be intelligible there must exist a vocabulary subsisting still enough for reflection and

silent enough for “objectification.”⁸⁹ Given the public character of poetic performance, the ability to infer and articulate the one from the many does not seem possible without the concomitant capacity to fix formula in writing, to isolate and, in effect, denarrativize the sense of the divine from its sound. And so, in this way, the most prolific of our first philosophers, Xenophanes, has been read as distinguishing forevermore the art of Homer from the emerging art of *Sophia*. But, of course, this is only one way the story can be told.

Chapter 3

Reconsidering Xenophanes

Although the sheer quantity of writing moderns have attributed to Xenophanes as a philosopher is unsurpassed until the dialogues of Plato,⁹⁰ much of Xenophanes' text is fragmentary. Still we have pieced together enough to allow us to attribute to Xenophanes the emergence—if not the invention—of at least three progressive ideas: (1) monotheism, challenging the pluralism of the Homeric pantheon as well as culturally relativistic accounts of the divine; and, (2) skepticism, with regard to the depth and breadth of human knowledge that is nevertheless tempered by, (3) a type of naturalistic mechanism concerning the “workings” of nature. These three ideas are interspersed in forty fragments, and all of Xenophanes' fragments are framed by the lengthy and prosaic B1 and B2 wherein Xenophanes claims the necessity of having respect for the gods⁹¹ as well as the greater virtue and political benefit of his *Sophia* over prevailing opinion.⁹² We can infer, then, that monotheism, skepticism, and naturalistic mechanism are interrelated attributes of Xenophanes' *Sophia*, the sum of which offers us our first demythologized account of the world.⁹³

One of the attributes of demythology is a deep—if not complete—rift between the worlds or realms of gods, man, and nature. That we live heir to such a rift has prompted many to read into Xenophanes the spirit of one who is “like-minded”:

[Xenophanes] would like to see many of the old myths excluded as being inventions of our fore-fathers. Thus at one stroke he consigns to the rubbish-heap the whole tradition on which the art of his fellow-rhapsodes has been based from the very beginning. The antiquity of a belief, for him, did not confer authority on it, but

rather the reverse: what had been worked out long before would no longer satisfy a progressive mind.⁹⁴

If Xenophanes rejects the old myths to this extent, there must be a reason or contributing factor other than Xenophanes possesses a progressive, re: modern, mind. Modern rationality does not emerge fully formed in ancient Greek dress—*like* Athena from the head of Zeus. To assume philosophic rationality somehow suddenly appears in ancient Greece is to actually *remythologize* the “birth of rationality” or “scientific consciousness.” It is more likely that we recognize and extract what is familiar sounding from Xenophanes’ fragments as his philosophic contribution, allowing what sounds non- or prephilosophic to remain mute and silent.

For instance, an element of Xenophanes’ writing we often pass over as prephilosophic is his reputation as a “wandering” bard.⁹⁵ Our modern eyes are trained to see and our ears calibrated to hear this as nonphilosophical. But a “wandering” bard is not just *what but how* one of our first philosophers is identified, and this fragment is often anthologized as B1, framing our literate reception of his complete thought. According to antiquity and our anthologies, then, Xenophanes is a bard and is, thereby, situated in the oral poetic tradition. Like any other bard, Xenophanes is trained in the art of oral versemaking and so he is also at least cognizant of the significance of sung speech: a speech that makes real what it says.⁹⁶

Then again, the claim that “speech is a part of *physis*” is not only incompatible with our basic understanding of speech and nature, it is also incompatible with the naturalistic mechanism we attribute to Xenophanes. That is, if Xenophanes is demythologizing the world, then there should be evidence in his fragments—at least by implication—that speech is not a part of *physis*. Whether Xenophanes’ thought supports this claim or not, however, requires fuller understanding of what the claim “speech is a part of *physis*” entails.

For the claim that “speech is a part of *physis*” implies that nature is inclusive of speech, that speech is a part of nature; thereby the origin of one is quite possibly the origin of the other. And this is, at least, odd to our way of thinking. While some consider that speech is a natural development of human being, few would consider speech is

natural the ways oceans and forests are natural. To illustrate, if we ask, "What is the origin of nature?" and the answer we receive includes reference to a theological system or a set of scientific hypotheses, the answer—whether we agree with it or not—is suitable to the question asked. But if we ask "What is the origin of speech?" and the answer we receive alludes to a family of Muses or a configuration of "quarks," such an answer ill fits the question. In fact, we might even say that the way the question "What is the origin of speech?" is framed indicates that we do not understand the character of the question. Inquiries about speech require us to talk about "whom" or "with whom" but not "what," for speech is a human activity.⁹⁷ Inquiries about nature, on the other hand, revolve for us around "what" but never "who"—for *physis* is an "object" that yields, or sometimes does not yield, to our observation and experimentation. Even if we accept that a certain degree of "subjectivity" cannot help but color our observation of *physis*, for the most part we believe that questions concerning the origin and laws of nature exclude questions concerning the origin and laws of speech, and *vice versa*.⁹⁸

Part of the difficulty hinges upon how we conceive and *speak* about nature—*physis*. In the twenty-first century, our general tendency is to divide *physis* into kinds or "worlds." Although there is a world that is properly called "natural" there is another world or there are other worlds that are more properly called "cultural"; these are seen as not "natural" or at least "less natural" than the "natural world."⁹⁹ These "non-natural" or "less natural" worlds include everything from industry to politics, and regardless of the natural resources which drive industry or the theories of human nature that sustain political paradigms, we draw and maintain a line between, say, urban, suburban, and "untamed" or "untouched" environments. The latter is "natural," the former are less and less "natural"¹⁰⁰ and while a variety of "subjects" identify themselves with one or the other of these "environments," most would agree that "human nature"—if we can even speak of this—differs significantly from all of these "environments."

As humans, we are capable of transcending our "environments" not by dint of physical force but by virtue of our intelligence. Our intelligence enables us to acquire and master communicative practices that are unparalleled by all other "natural" species. While other

beings “communicate,” humans do so by means of highly sophisticated and grammatically complex languages.¹⁰¹ And since, for most of us, *physis* itself does not “speak” and is not “intelligent,” it seems to follow that our languages and our intelligence are “non-natural,” or at least not “natural” in the same way that the sky and the woods are.¹⁰² But this also means that human language and intelligence cannot be adequately explained by appeals to natural “instinct,” behavioral psychology, neurology, or even evolutionary biology. The vocabulary that drives these “human sciences” has been cultivated from the “natural sciences,” and yet to attempt to explain what differentiates us from “nature” by means of the vocabulary we use to describe nature is again to confuse the character of the question; hence, we seem to be at a loss with respect to the ways we are able to understand and articulate the different “kinds” or “worlds” of nature, including our own.

Before we can decide whether speech is indeed a part of *physis*, we must confront the riddles created by our own conceptual schemes. To this extent, some historians of philosophy explain that these riddles originate long ago when we begin to divide the world into the worlds or realms of divinity, humanity, and nature, i.e., when we begin to demythologize the world into worlds. Again, since Xenophanes is one of the “fathers” of demythology, we should find ample support in his writings that the claim “speech is a part of *physis*” is inappropriate, if not false. For is it not Xenophanes who says that the One God, greatest among gods and men, is not like us in body or mind? And is it also not Xenophanes who claims that a rainbow is not a messenger of Zeus, but nothing more or less than a cloud “purple and flame-red and yellow to behold” (B32).¹⁰³ Indeed, we might be tempted to say that in one fell swoop Xenophanes irreparably separates the divine from the human, and nature from both; for he also tells us that this One God is capable of steering all things by the force of his *noos*—his divine mind.¹⁰⁴ Although human beings are also endowed with *noos* and by virtue of this we are capable of relying upon our experience and reason to judge what is “better,” we are incapable of the kind of intelligence or power attributed to the divine mind. Human *noos* might accidentally stumble upon truth, but such contingency is not conducive to real knowledge. Also, since a “rainbow” is a cloud and a cloud is not a sign from Zeus,

we cannot suppose to “read” from nature the character and intent of the divine. Rather, a viable account of natural processes must have little or nothing to do with divinity or humanity.¹⁰⁵

Xenophanes, then, is in a peculiar position: he is by self-proclamation a bard who “at one stroke [he] consigns to the rubbish-heap the whole tradition on which the art of his fellow-rhapsodes has been based from the very beginning . . .” Setting aside the question of how one consigns an entire tradition to the rubbish heap, doing so would certainly bring to an end the practices of sung speech. For if Xenophanes and others do begin to “divide up the world” in the ways we attribute to them, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for “sung speech” to continue to abide in such a “divided world.” Sung speech originates and emanates from divine memory¹⁰⁶—this is what circumscribes its efficacious character. Yet how could “sung speech” continue to function in a “world” within which the divine and the human, by definition, have no commerce?

A plausible route to Xenophanes, then, seems compromised by the differences between what we know of the Greek oral poetic tradition and what we expect of Xenophanes as a “progressive mind.” Xenophanes is, to be sure, a citizen of the *hoi sophoi*, the wise ones. Like Thales and Anaximander before him, his voice is considered memorable enough to be preserved in text that is about him or composed by him.¹⁰⁷ But, of course, what Xenophanes’ writings say awaits the voice of a reader, and different readers might plausibly tell different stories.

For instance, from the writings that are available to us we can hear that Xenophanes is challenging a complicated web of archaic Greek beliefs and values which he calls “Opinion,” and that he intends in some way to replace this opinion with *sophia*. He tells us, initially, that his *sophia* is more valuable than athletic excellence and that the one who practices *sophia* is more deserving of the rewards the city currently bestows upon its athletes.¹⁰⁸ The athlete, Xenophanes says, displays “fleetness of foot” and great “feats of strength,” and because of this the athlete is given a “conspicuous seat of honor at competitions”; the athlete’s material needs and wants are financed with funds and supplies from the public store, and in excess of this he receives gifts “to lay aside as treasure.” Moreover, it matters not if the athlete excels by virtue of

his own physical strength for even those who succeed on horseback are accorded such high rewards. But why should this be so; why should physical strength be preferred to *sophia*? Athletes do not contribute to the treasure chambers of the *polis*; rather they drain these resources. And “it is not the presence of a good boxer in a community . . . that will give a *polis* a better constitution.” Rather it is “I” who deserve these honors because I display not “fleetness of foot” but *sophia*, and it is *sophia* which will secure a better constitution for the *polis*.

Werner Jaeger concludes from this that Xenophanes is primarily concerned with the institution of a new culture whose motivating force is “the power of the intellect which creates justice and law, right order and welfare, in the city.”¹⁰⁹ For Jaeger, this “power of the intellect”—*noos*—is indispensable to “right order” in the city: *noos* is the source for all good government and is evident in the well-being of the citizens it guides. It is *noos*, then, that marks the difference between Xenophanes’ *sophia* and the “Opinion” of other men.

It is undeniable that Xenophanes privileges *noos* as a kind of human excellence, but, *pace* Jaeger, it is not clear how *noos* is capable of establishing good government, nor that *noos* is entirely absent from prevailing “Opinion.” Is Xenophanes claiming that the old culture is entirely devoid of *noos*, or that *noos* should be accorded a higher, perhaps the highest, place among the rankings of human excellence? While Xenophanes is aware that different activities demand different skills, he questions whether physical strength and agility denote the most excellent of these skills. Certainly athletic ability serves some civic function, but how does it compare with other abilities? Moreover, which abilities are potentially the most beneficial when it comes to contributing to the *arete* of the *polis*? If it is not specifically physical ability that contributes to the *arête* of a *polis*, then why does Xenophanes posit *Sophia* in its place? Does he mean by *Sophia* only intellectual ability, or does *Sophia* encompass also honor, leadership, honesty, i.e., other civic virtues?

Conventional answers to these questions maintain that Xenophanes’ distinction between intellectual and physical ability is a general theme throughout the literature of his era. According to W. K. C. Guthrie, for one, Xenophanes is saying nothing more or less than did Solon or Theognis. Moreover, Guthrie following Bowra suggests that

the depreciation of athletic ability, once thought to represent the nascent stage of democratic thought, is actually an overtly aristocratic attempt to hearken back to a time when “words were more honored than athletic success.”¹¹⁰ This time “when words [are] more honored than athletic success” apparently predates Xenophanes by a century or more: it is a time marked by the pervasiveness of “sung speech” and the significance of praise.

Contrary to Guthrie’s claim that Xenophanes, by “hearkening back,” is making an overtly aristocratic gesture, Leslie Kurke suggests that Xenophanes’ criticism of athletic contest is, rather, overtly antiaristocratic.¹¹¹ Her reasoning is thus: records of late-sixth-century Olympic contestants show an increased participation by aristocracy.¹¹² This “increased participation” might indicate an aristocratic attempt to manipulate an “economy of praise” that prescribes these events. By an “economy of praise” Kurke means that from the Homeric era forward, the victor’s crown, his procession through the gates of the city, and the emerging statuary and funerary monuments dedicated to his victory prescribe an “exchange” of divine favor—*kudos*—for the good of, initially, the sovereign and, eventually, the entire *politeia* (141). The underlying idea is that those who “receive” *kudos* are, as it were, marked for victory. They are irradiant with the favor—a gift—of the gods. Moreover, the “gift” of athletic victory often translates into military victory: he who wears the crown of athletic contest might also be he who secures the safekeeping of the *polis* (137). Hence, the story of Milos of Kroton, who “marched out to battle wearing his six Olympic crowns” (141).

In this way, *kudos* is inextricably connected to the well-being of the city. If the aristocrats’ increased participation in the Olympic games is an attempt to secure *kudos* for themselves and so restore or renew aristocratic power within the *politeia*, then Xenophanes’ criticism of the honors accorded to athletes might be a specific indictment of this attempt. Kurke writes: “In response to a serious aristocratic bid for renewed talismanic authority within the community, Xenophanes counters with a very different model of civic good, consciously rejecting talismanic power in favor of material well-being” (155).¹¹³

While Kurke’s insight into the historical and cultural context of Xenophanes’ fragment B2 is invaluable, it presupposes that Xenophanes

rejects out of the hand the “talismanic power” of praise.¹¹⁴ The “talismanic power” the aristocracy apparently seek is similar—if not identical—to the authority conferred by victory monuments *and* the writing upon them. That is, the aristocracy can manipulate *kudos* because its residual presence is reinforced and sustained by “victory monuments.” These monuments are often inscribed with a “victory announcement” that lists the victor’s surname, homeland, event and age class. The “inscribed” monument marks the residual presence of *kudos* because it “immortalizes” the victor at the moment of his greatest glory—the receipt of the crown. Following the work of Joseph Day, Kurke also suggests that within the practices of archaic Greece these “memorials” *act* to preserve and sustain *kudos* for the collective. The inscriptions and the monuments “function together . . . for the original ritual event [as] ‘scripts’ for its *reenactment*” (144). That is, the inscribed monuments invite passersby to see, touch, and read aloud the “facts” that do not merely describe or remind, but in effect *re-present* the original gift of the gods. In this way, the inscribed monuments are not *just* artistic representations of former “heroes”; rather, the epigrams and victor-statues are meant to “elicit from [their] beholder a perfect re-creation of the original announcement and coronation” (145). Kurke explains: “As the viewer lent his voice to the epigram that reconstructed the victory announcement, he stood in the position of Hellanokidas [the original bestower of the original crown] and crowned the victor with his gaze” (145).

“Re-enactment,” then, is not a singular, private commemoration but a public act made possible by the collective memory of an entire community. The bestowal as well as the benefit of *kudos* is, as in sung speech, public. *Kudos* cannot be, then, a “talisman” in our sense of the term. Rather, *kudos* is part of a communicative practice that sustains and prompts praise. Just as *kudos* is bestowed upon a victor the verbal rhythm of sung speech is bestowed upon an oral poet. An oral poet’s singing, then, is an activity and affect of *kudos* much as a victory attributed to an athlete is an activity and affect of divine favor—praise. For sung speech is, as Detienne observes, “laudatory speech”—a speech of praise.

Importantly, the significance of *kudos* in ancient Greek experience is incomplete without its twin force or power, *kleos*, or divine return.

According to Detienne, sung speech abides in a cycle of *kudos* and *kleos*: *kudos* is divine favor, *kleos* is divine return;¹¹⁵ hence, what originates with the divine, *kudos*, returns to the divine, *kleos*. Support for Detienne's claim is found at 29–34 in the *Theogony* Here, Hesiod sings:

So they spoke, these mistresses of words,
daughters of great Zeus,
and they broke off and handed me a staff
of strong-growing
olive shoot, a wonderful thing;
they breathed a voice into me,
and power to sing the story of things
of the future, and things past.
They told me to sing the race
of the blessed gods everlasting,
but always to put themselves
at the beginning and end of my singing.¹¹⁶

The Muses' command that they *always* be "put" at the beginning and at the end of Hesiod's singing illustrates the pattern of *kudos-kleos* that supports and sustains the efficacious character of "laudatory" or sung speech. That is, the Muses breathe a voice into an oral poet, and an oral poet sings a song of praise that nurtures the processes of creation: praise generating life. In this way, sung speech, as a media of praise, *reenacts* the originary *act* of praise—the Father's realization (*krainei*) of the Muses: life generating praise. Divine favor, then, is constitutive of the birth of songs of praise, and these songs of praise, in turn, nurture or "give birth" to the processes of life. By virtue of praise the oral poet is granted the power to praise, and the power to praise is received and sustained by and through the verbal rhythm of praise, *mousa*. Thus, the power to sing the collection of tales is truly a gift from the gods, and this gift abides in a cycle of *kudos-kleos*, divine favor-divine return: life generating praise generating life.

A similar configuration obtains for the dynamics of *reenactment*. Just as the "song" bestowed to the poet does not belong only to the poet, the *kudos* bestowed upon the victor *does not belong* only to the victor; rather, *kudos* continues to be acted out in the reciting aloud of

the “victory announcement.” I use the term “recite” because most victory announcements inscribed on monuments do not narrate or provide an account of the moment of coronation, but simply list age, class, and event. In *reenactment*, then, as in sung speech, the focus of *kudos* is on the performance of *kudos* and not necessarily upon a *narration* of the event. Nor does it seem to matter “who” performs—“who” reads aloud, or “who” sings: the emphasis is upon the act of *kudos*; for it is by virtue of the act that *kudos* returns from whence it comes—the divine.

If there is a conceivable communicative purpose for reenactment and sung speech, then it must include the character of *kleos*. And if there is a formula for praising the divine, it is exceedingly simple: what comes from the gods returns to the gods, *kudos-kleos*. In this way, our traditional interpretation of *kleos* as a fame that surpasses mortal death is appropriate but incomplete. Certainly in ancient Greek thought and experience Achilles lives on as long as his song is sung or his tale is told. What we often sidestep, however, is the existential significance of this claim: that indeed Achilles continues to exist because he is not-forgotten, and he is not-forgotten because of sung speech—speech that makes real what it says.

Based upon our usual interpretations of Xenophanes, he can have no share in something like “talismanic power” or poetry that abides in a cycle of *kudos-kleos*. Rather it seems Xenophanes entirely rejects the power of *kudos* and thereby the efficacy of sung speech. Xenophanes’ focus is, alternatively, *Sophia*—wisdom—and we assume wisdom is for Xenophanes, as it is for Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a distinctly intellectual virtue the yield of which is theoretical “knowledge.”

Of what can be known Xenophanes says the gods have not revealed all things to men from the beginning, but rather by “long seeking” men discover what is better.¹¹⁷ Some interpret this to mean that “long seeking” requires the desire or the impulse to understand something that is not immediately given or “not momentarily visible.” This could suggest that “long seeking” occurs over a lifetime. In a manner of trial and error we come to know that x is better than y. Coming to know, then, characterizes the process and result of experience, for as Xenophanes says: No man knows, or ever will know, the truth about

the gods and about everything I speak of; for even if one chanced to say the complete truth, yet oneself knows it not [αὐτός ὅμως οὐκ οἶδε]; but seeming is wrought over all things [*or* fancy is wrought in the case of men] (B34).¹¹⁸

Then again, “long seeking” could also characterize a particular disposition *toward* experience. As Jaeger suggests, Xenophanes’ writing seems to be full of “an immediate sense of awe at the sublimity of the Divine.”¹¹⁹ In support of Jaeger’s suggestion, Xenophanes’ “immediate sense” is carefully conveyed by the vocabulary Xenophanes employs. For instance, Xenophanes says: What they call Iris [rainbow], this too is cloud, purple and red and yellow to behold (B32).¹²⁰ The term he uses to describe the vision of a rainbow is *idesthai*, the middle infinitive of the Greek *oida* which can be translated as “to see” or “to know” but is most appropriately translated “to behold.”¹²¹

While Xenophanes does seem to depersonify a rainbow—is not Iris—and perhaps in so doing he also deanthropomorphizes the rainbow, the depersonification and deanthropomorphization of natural phenomena does not necessarily entail the de-divination of natural phenomenon. To the contrary, *idesthai* is a term common to formulaic diction and its appearance in Xenophanes’ writings further roots him in the oral tradition.¹²² For if, as mechanistic accounts of Xenophanes maintain, he is stripping *physis* of its sublime and divine elements, why would he use the term *idesthai*?¹²³ It is more likely that what is appropriate to say of an ancient Greek experience of nature is also appropriate to say of Xenophanes: that unlike modern notions of nature as brute, dumb matter, the ancients perceive nature as *thoroughly* alive. What we might conceive of and experience as an “object,” Xenophanes “beholds” as a living entity. And what we might describe in terms of water vapor and refracting light, Xenophanes speaks of in terms of reverence. Although we might chance to “behold” a rainbow, a landscape, or a vista, our experience of the “natural world” is determined by *our* knowledge that nature does not possess as do we, intelligence. The “what” of what we behold is fundamentally distinct, unlike us in body and *without* mind. As such, *physis* cannot be said to speak or to have intelligence. If we wish to understand nature, we must supply the language that accurately interprets the “laws” of nature. And yet for the ancient Greeks,

whatever is alive is intelligent and does speak and can be heard if, as Heraclitus suggests, one has ears to hear.¹²⁴

The reciprocal relations between divinity, praise, and nature that support sung speech and *reenactment* are incommensurable with a “worldview” that posits man on the one hand and divinity on the other with nature—somehow divine and somehow human—in between. For Xenophanes, at least, divinity, nature, and humanity intercommunicate and interpenetrate. The wise man does not merely “see” or “know” nature: he beholds. While this claim is compatible with ancient Greek experience, it is also consistent with what some classicists have long recognized: that one of the particular attributes of ancient Greek divinity is that the divine is always more than its visible or audible presence makes known. Jean-Pierre Vernant writes:

In the context of religious thought, every form of figuration must introduce an inevitable tension: the idea is to establish real contact with the world beyond, to actualize it, to make it present, and thereby to participate intimately in the divine; yet by the same move, it must also emphasize what is inaccessible and mysterious in divinity, its alien quality, its otherness.¹²⁵

Xenophanes’ idea that the gods have not revealed all things to men and so man cannot know all things but by “long seeking” might come to know what is better, is a perfect expression of the “inevitable tension” wrought by an ancient Greek experience of the divine.

Moreover, of divinity Xenophanes says there is “One God, greatest among gods and men, in no way similar to mortals either in body or in thought” (B23). “Always he remains in the same place, moving not at all, nor is it fitting for him to go to different places at different times, but without toil he shakes all things by the thought of his mind” (B26, 25). “All of him sees, all thinks, and all hears” (B24).¹²⁶

While the phrase “greatest among gods and men” could undermine the claim that Xenophanes is monotheistic, e.g. the superlative greatest implies others less great, many argue that “greatest among gods and men” is an epithet “leftover” from the oral tradition, and that Xenophanes uses it “mischievously” or otherwise.¹²⁷ But if Xenophanes, as we often infer, composed his writings, stylus in hand,

it is difficult to understand why he would include a “leftover” or “empty phrase.” It is more likely that he, or another, includes the phrase in writing to keep to a verbal rhythm. If this is the case, it reaffirms the idea that Xenophanes’ writing preserves the sound of Xenophanes. Nor does it stand to reason that Xenophanes would sing a phrase “mischievously,” like a satirist pausing to determine if his audience “gets” the satire. It is more plausible that the phrase—έν τε θεοῖσί καί ανθρώποισί μέγιστος—is formulaic: its sound, like the sound of *idesthai*, is common to oral poetry and thereby consistent with the epithet of Xenophanes’ as a “wandering” bard.

Also characteristic of oral poetic speaking, Xenophanes articulates the One God in terms of what this One God does and does not do: he does not move from place to place, but he does steer or “shake(s) all things” by the power of his *noos*. Like Homer’s Zeus and Hesiod’s *Dike*, Xenophanes’ God is active. How, then, is Xenophanes’ God a deanthropomorphized God? As McKirahan observes, the adjectives Xenophanes attributes to his God are not in neuter but in masculine form.¹²⁸ As well, Kirk, Raven, and Schofield explain that Xenophanes’ suggestion that the One God is unlike mortals in body and mind does not entail that this One God is bodiless; rather, the One God might *have* a body “but it is motionless.” Xenophanes speaks, then, of a single, masculine god who steers all things by the force of his thought. Indeed, this One God does not move to different places at different times, but from this it does not follow the One God is inactive: without toil he shakes all things by the thought of his mind. While Kirk, Raven, and Schofield suggest that Xenophanes’ One God seems to be contrary to a Homeric god, they do write:

That thought or intelligence can affect things outside the thinker, without the agency of limbs, is a development—but a very bold one—of the Homeric idea that a god can accomplish his end merely by implanting, for example, Infatuation (*Ate*) in a mortal.¹²⁹

Xenophanes does not say, however, that the One God “implants” his thought but that the One God steers or shakes all things by his thought, i.e., that a causal or correlative factor of all things is divine intellect—divine *noos*. Within the context of sung speech, however,

there is nothing bold about claiming that the “Father of All” can steer or “shake all things” by the power of his *noos*. In the tale of the origin of “sung speech” the “Father” approves and the Muses are realized (*krainēi*). In this way, Xenophanes’ One God is not incommensurable with the image of the “Father of All” who *forthwith*—without toil—brings the Muses into being.

Moreover, throughout the Homeric tradition, similar “stories” abound concerning what Detienne calls the “oracular” efficacy of Apollo.¹³⁰ Since it is not contrary to the oral tradition, then, to attribute some type of intellectual activity or force to the gods, Xenophanes’ characterization of the One God is compatible with the communicative practices of sung speech.

Then again, Xenophanes does apparently trouble the Homeric tradition in fragments B11, B14, B15, and B16:

Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods everything that is a shame and reproach among men, stealing and committing adultery and deceiving each other. But mortals consider that the gods are born, and that they have clothes and speech and bodies like their own. The Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black, the Thracians that theirs have light blue eyes and red hair. But if cattle and horses or lions had hands, or were able to draw with their hands and do the works that men can do, horses would draw the forms of the gods like horses, and cattle like cattle, and they would make their bodies such as they each had themselves.¹³¹

From these fragments, we have pieced together an account of Xenophanes’ thought as follows: If Egyptians portray their gods as snub-nosed and Thracians portray their gods with “blue eyes and red hair,” then it seems each culture attributes its most general sense of itself to the divine. Moreover, would not horses portray their gods as horselike, and lions as lionlike, if they could? How is this a proper way to praise the gods? In the case of Homer and Hesiod this proves particularly devastating because wickedness and deception are neither commendable nor, one would hope, generalizable human traits: they are a means for reproach among the very species that divinizes them.

And so, the fragments that directly criticize Homer and Hesiod are interpreted as an indictment of cultural relativism *and* the accounts of the gods that entail or are entailed by such relativism. Xenophanes' "solution" to the problem of relativism is, of course, deanthropomorphic monotheism: there is One God unlike all mortals in "body and thought." If this God is not like mortals, then any image or account of this God which includes, or compares this God with, mortals or mortal entities or attributes is inaccurate *and* impious.¹³²

Yet, if this is a plausible account of Xenophanes' thought, then it also *cannot be said* that one mortal is more like the divine than any other, and this includes sixth-century aristocrats as well as poet-philosophers. For if the one god is not like any mortal, then no mortal can legitimately claim the favor of the gods. Rather, what comes from the gods—*kudos*—returns to the gods—*kleos*. Hence, an aspect of the "old myths" that troubles Xenophanes might have more to do with the shameful, capricious, and licentious behavior attributed to the gods than it does with an anthropomorphic rendering of the gods. An anthropomorphic rendering of the gods does not necessarily entail their shameful, capricious, and licentious behavior. But the shameful and licentious behavior attributed to the gods *could* imply that the gods are, indeed, like us in body and mind: hence, no longer "inaccessible" or "mysterious."

Moreover, shameful, licentious, and capricious behavior is blameworthy behavior as communicated in blameworthy speech. But blameworthy speech holds no share in the type of speech that originates in divine memory. Sung speech is born as the "Father of All" approves the prophet's praise. This praise nurtures the whole of creation and, as prophetic, promises the continuation of creation as long as the Muses sing. While praise nurtures the processes of life, blame silences these processes, affecting death and *lethe*—what is forgotten.

If other bards attribute shameful or blameworthy actions to the gods then these actions are not rightly said of the gods. Nor does it stand to reason that such things would be said by the Muse, for whatever is blameworthy is eventually silenced and dies. Yet the gods, unlike mortals, do not die. Xenophanes' concern about a proper way to praise the gods might not entail an absolute demarcation between

the divine and human as much as it points to a deep miscommunication about the collective and reverent character of *kudos*. As Kurke suggests, if the aristocracy succeed in manipulating *kudos*—e.g. if they win often at the Olympic games—then they will be irradiant with a divine favor that often translates into military victory and political power. In order to manipulate *kudos*, however, one must presuppose that *kudos* is manipulable; that it is not a gift but a means of exchange. But this is to assume that, indeed, praise is an economy: that the communicative practices of *kudos* somehow regulate a system of exchange between gods and men. The mysterious and inaccessible “otherness” of the divine is thereby usurped by the very human practice of “exchange.” *Kudos*, then, is not demythologized as much as it is thoroughly humanized.

The monotheism, skepticism, and naturalistic mechanism we attribute to the writings of Xenophanes could be indicative of a reappropriation of the world in specifically human terms. The role of our first philosophers in this humanistic turn, however, is questionable at the least. For Xenophanes’ writings can also be interpreted in the terms of a longstanding oral poetic tradition that is sustained by and persists in wonder and reverence: *thauma idesthai*. Xenophanes’ *Sophia* might proclaim that the only “exchange” or “economy” *kudos* entails obtains *from* the divine and *to* the divine. As Detienne suggests, sung speech abides in a cycle of *kudos-kleos*: *Kudos* is divine favor, and *kleos* is divine return; hence, what comes from the divine, *kudos*, returns to the divine, *kleos*, or stated another way, what comes from the divine *is* divine, *remains* divine, and *returns* divine. That a bard “lends his voice” to the breath of the Muses might in no way taint or mar the character of sung speech because the focus of sung speech is more upon the *act of praise* and less upon the person “who” praises. If a poet, or a victor, attempts to lay claim to his “song” or his victory—i.e., if a poet attempts to “sign” onto his speech, or if a victor attempts to “use” his victory to reestablish political power, then might the cycle of *kudos-kleos*—as we are able to bear witness to it—become broken. Perhaps this is part of what concerns our first philosophers: not that the economy is being manipulated, but that praise connotes an economy or an exchange that *can* be manipulated.

Chapter 4

Reconsidering Speech

By the end of the seventh century, among a landscape of unsigned monuments and shrines, signatures begin to appear at the base of statues.¹³³ Detienne suggests that the appearance of “signatures” on paintings and sculpture indicates an emerging “self-consciousness” about the figurative or representative character of *poesis* in general.¹³⁴ That is, the “artist” begins to see himself as an “agent,” “a creator, situated midway between reality and its image” (109). As “midway between reality and its image,” the artist begins to conceive of himself as not just one involved in the activity of making, but as a maker himself. In this way, his art becomes a creation—an entity—that his hands and eyes play a part in making. And so art comes to be considered as a product of his own abilities as an artist, and its symbolic function is contrived through his own agency, and not—as was previously understood—through the “agency” of the divine.

Prior to the appearance of signatures, statues and images were created “anonymously” and, according to Detienne, dotted the cultural landscape of archaic Greece as *religious signs*. The anonymous character of these signs is similar to the authorless voice that sings the songs of sung speech. As long as statues, images, and sung speech are anonymous, or “unsigned,” they “belong” simultaneously to no one and to everyone—religious or otherwise. Although Detienne considers archaic statuary to act as *religious signs* it does not follow from this that archaic statues do not also act as public or civic signs.¹³⁵ To the contrary, the “unsigned” and anonymous character of archaic statuary and sung speech implies that statuary and oral poetry act within the public sphere and function primarily as “public” or “communal” signs. As “communal,” statuary and sung speech are made possible by the practices of an entire community and in this way occupy a central position in daily archaic Greek life. Specifically

sung speech, like victory monuments, are sustained by a collective memory and the practices of praise—*kudos/kleos*—to the extent that if *kudos* can be said to “belong” anywhere and to anyone it belongs properly to the divine, i.e., what comes from the divine returns to the divine.

The signing of statuary and eventual assigning of *muthos* to Homer or Homeric poets might indicate that the collective character of these communicative practices is becoming supplemented—or replaced—by individual agency. A proliferation of signatures, like a “definitive” version of the epics attributed to a single poet “Homer,” might challenge the idea that this performance or this victory is indeed a gift of the gods. Rather, this statue, this monument, and—as the coming of choral poetry attests¹³⁶—this song is an offering from mortals to mortals even if such an offering is said to be in commemoration *of or to* the gods. Further, that art comes to be considered as “figurative” or “representative” challenges—or at least changes—the position of art and artistry within the communicative practices that sustain and preserve praise. That is, self-consciousness about *poesis* could certainly encourage the notion that this statuary, this song, is about some *x* that is otherwise not present, i.e., art *represents rather than is* what is or was present. Hence, a signature or a “name” chiseled or uttered is possibly a means of claiming for oneself an image of the real.

Then again, a signature could also be a means of directing or guiding those who see and those who hear to the origin of an image or story. That is, by drawing attention to itself as artifice, a signature could be a component of praise. Either way, however, the concepts we interpret as antecedent or consequent to the material facts of signatures need to be redressed in the material facts of archaic Greek life. While the *emergence* of agency and representation is made plausible by developing techniques of writing, the practice of writing cannot itself account for the scope of a conceptual shift from anonymous making to artistic agency. Given the activity of first writing and the necessity of sound to this activity it is difficult to understand how modern concepts of agency, intention, and even representation, could emerge from—or urge on—the writing process.

Then again, there is no doubt that writing poses certain problems for an oral poet. These problems include the materiality of writing against the—possibly preferred—immateriality of sung speech.

While writing is tedious and tertiary, there is also a greater possibility of misunderstanding or miscommunication associated with text. Ancient texts are unintelligible without the voice of a reader. Yet to correctly read an ancient text also poses a number of problems. Without an acoustic memory of how a text sounds, readers must be trained to recite from writing as if they are composing from memory. But even if an ancient bard memorizes the text and then orally performs, composition and performance have become two separate activities: the poet is only imitating oral versemaking and the origin of his inspiration is not a Muse but a text.

There are, as well, temporal differences between the communicative force of writing and sung speech in particular. While the meaning of writing is always deferred—for a text awaits a reader—the meaning of sung speech is never deferred—sung speech is direct and immediate, it is never a *was*, but is always an “*is*.” In other words, while writing appears to persist through time—the written word is fixed and unchanging—the activity of (ancient) reading is fraught with tense: what *was* written *is now* spoken. Alternatively, oral poetic performance is a communicative activity configured by and in the present: what *is* spoken *is* the breath of the Muse. Because Muses are divine memory it is tempting to consider oral poets and audiences understand *muthos* as a collection of tales *about* a past that is divinely remembered. But this is to suppose that divine memory acts similarly to human memory, and sung speech acts like ordinary speech. According to Xenophanes, however, whatever the divine *noos* is it is not like human *noos*. In this, at least, our skepticism must yield to Xenophanes’ reverence.

Moreover, for poet and audience alike, sung speech is an event that in Kurke’s terms *reenacts* rather than *represents* the origin of sung speech, the birth of the Muses *as mousa*. By analogy, the temporal stress of *reenactment* is equally upon the *re* and the *act*. The victor is not simply crowned *once again* as if the viewer is remembering or recalling an event recently or long past. Rather, the victor *is* crowned, present tense. Further, this act will be returned to again and again: it “*was, is, and always will be*” an event that simultaneously draws upon memory and promises continual renewal: sung speech is speech that makes real what it says. In this way, the what of what occurs, what sung speech and reenactment make real, is the possibility of the presence of the

divine as an event, a “happening.” Sung speech, then, is not speech about an event; it is an event.

The differences between speech that makes real what it says and speech about the real are as significant as it might be difficult for us to grasp because our basic understanding of speech is that speech is always about some *x*. This basic understanding is supported by a theory of signs that rests upon a representational disposition to and experience of language. A representational understanding of language, moreover, requires that certain differences obtain between speakers, and speakers and signs. Since sung speech does not—or does not yet—meet these criteria, disentangling some of our theories and assumptions about speech alongside the practices of sung speech might yield more clearly what sung speech can or does, and cannot or does not, do.

Most would agree that many of our ways of understanding—and speaking about—speech presuppose a basic difference between a speaker and her audience.¹³⁷ For speech to be at all possible there must be at least two speakers¹³⁸ and between these two speakers there must be “a sense of not being identical, of being other . . .”¹³⁹ Although speech is meant—or *intended*—to affect a relation between a speaker and her audience, it seems self-evident that the “I” who speaks is not identical to the “I” or “the other I” who hears. Moreover, neither the “I” who speaks, nor the “I” who hears, is identical to the words spoken and heard: words are “signs” and speakers and audiences are “who’s”; hence, most of our ways of understanding speech rest upon a configuration or “triangulation” between speakers and signs. Moreover, within such a configuration, “difference” is said to obtain not only for and between speakers, speakers and signs, but also for and between levels or orders of signification.

We can attempt to override basic differences between speakers or subjects by maintaining that all speakers are similar—or identical—by virtue of their shared cognitive structure and linguistic capacity, or all speakers are similar by virtue of their sharing a world structured or organized in linguistic terms. In this way, “difference” can be addressed and analyzed in terms of a speaker’s individuated actualization of her linguistic capacity, or her competency—perhaps mastery—of the communicative practices that structure her being—psychoanalytically and pragmatically—in the world.¹⁴⁰ Along the first route, we attempt to

override basic differences between speakers by appealing to something like a principle of *noos* as a human, rational, and linguistic capacity. By the second route, we might attempt to *explain* basic differences between speakers, deferring to something like the symbolic order(s) of human communities. Either way, we soon confront the need to understand why and how communication does not always achieve its purpose. For just as it is clear that between two or more speakers communication is meant to affect some purpose, it is also clear that between two or more speakers, or two or more systems of signs, communication can, and often does, fail.¹⁴¹ The reasons for miscommunication are various: perhaps the terminology is ambiguous, or vocabulary is specific to only one speaker, i.e., the fault lies in the ubiquity of language or its structures. But the variety of ways communication misfires are equally matched by the various reasons why and how understanding does or does not depend upon participants' strict adherence to the "rules" or "system" that make language possible; that is, even when proper use of tense, word order, pronunciation, and the like go awry, speakers can and do understand one another.¹⁴² This suggests that perhaps contrary to the rules of signification the purpose of communication—understanding in the broadest sense—can be achieved. In this way, miscommunication is a sufficient but not necessary condition for misunderstanding. When we consider the innumerable instances of willing ourselves not to speak, intending not to hear, or of breaking off communication, and when we further consider how these instances dot our personal landscapes and how these moments mark the complexities and intersections of our most private and political lives, it becomes clear that at times we cannot, i.e., will not, speak with one another.

That the success or failure of communication rests upon a person's intent and willingness to speak (or to hear) presupposes a "subject-centered" or "individualistic subjectivist"¹⁴³ account of communication. Subject-centered theories of communication maintain that all speech acts originate in the individual psyche, including one's will or desire to speak or not to speak. By contrast, sung speech does not imply, and is not entailed by, a poet's desire to speak or not to speak in our general sense of an intentionality or willingness that underdetermines all speech acts. Sung speech originates with divine speech,

and while divine speech is properly “autonomous,” oral composition and performance are not “autonomous.” The Muses breathe a song into an oral poet, and this song is received as a “gift from the gods.” As a gift from the gods, oral poetry is an act of *kudos*—it is a gift of praise that no oral poet can choose to withhold just as no athlete could choose to withhold victory. Oral poetic pronouncement, then, is not a manifestation of an individual speaker’s will.

Since it cannot be the intention of a poet, or the willingness of his audience, that drives the dynamics of sung speech, we might consider that the language and materials of sung speech—its formula and verbal rhythm—are configured to suit a more objective communicative purpose. That is, the collective character of *muthos* complements—if not supplements—the theories of language and communication that purport to explain how and why speech and writing work aside from the preferences and dispositions of individual speakers and writers. In this way, a more “objectivist” approach to communication might better translate the efficacious character of “sung speech” into contemporary terms.

The most pervasive and influential “objectivist” account of speech and language derives, in part or in whole, from Saussurian linguistics, that maintains:

In distinguishing language (*langue*) from utterance (*parole*), we by the same token, distinguish (1) what is social from what is individual, and (2) what is essential from what is accessory and more or less random . . . Language is not a function of the speaker; it is a product that the individual registers passively: it never relies upon premeditation and reflection plays no part in it . . . Utterance, on the contrary, is an individual act of will and intelligence . . .¹⁴⁴

Given its collective character, sung speech is certainly more public and social than private and individual, and, given the evolution and adaptation of formulaic diction, sung speech preserves what is essential rather than accidental or accessory to the entire narrative of tales. Within this system, the acts of a speaker—a poet, audience member, or even a villager reciting a victory announcement—are

particular and contingent. As the result of a person's will and intelligence, such speech is individual—an utterance—but as such is idiosyncratic and nonanalyzable. According to an objectivist approach, then, the focus of analysis must shift to *langue* or language. Language is, unlike utterance, analyzable because it is comprised of a "system of forms" reducible to "identical elements" and the relations between them. These "identical elements" are (1) phonetic, providing "rules" for pronunciation, (2) grammatical, providing structure, and (3) lexical, providing histories and varieties of customary usage and meaning. While speakers are free to mispronounce, invert, or collapse word order, and to question or diverge from customary meaning, this freedom does not change the "fact" that identical elements and their relations provide a stability and unity without which speech would be impossible.

Initially, it seems that sung speech too is impossible without its "identical elements" and the relations between them. While each oral composition and performance is, in some sense, unique, Homeric oral poets adopt and adapt a formulaic diction suited to a specific verbal rhythm. To a certain extent, then, our scholarship about sung speech adapts or adopts an objectivist distinction between *langue* and *parole* to understand and explain oral composition. Consider (1) oral composition is authorless, and (2) the spontaneous or individual element of oral versemaking—its artistry—is, in some sense, less important or significant because (3) our access to the oral tradition is, of course, through its manifestation in writing, so (4) the essential elements of composition are virtually all that remains, i.e., *langue*. It is not without good reason, then, that we focus on the "identical elements" of oral composition—the formula—and the relations between them—metricity. But because "objectivist" accounts dismiss utterances out of hand, we might also downplay what we ascertain as the performative elements of sung speech—gesture, cadence, intonation, facial expression, and so on: the performative elements that are inseparable from oral versemaking, for oral versemaking is composed *as* performance.

Gregory Nagy, for one, argues that the performative element of sung speech must be taken into account *because* it is repetitive and therein lies its force.¹⁴⁵ Nagy's claim is that an oral poetic performance is a type

of ritual performance, and so like all ritual, oral poetic performance is meant to elicit a preconceived response, what he calls the “mentality of unchangeability.” Even though certain details of oral composition and performance can and do change, the overall disposition to and experience of oral poetic performance remains the same, between speaker and audience, and from performance to performance.

I understand Nagy to mean that speaker and audience share a set of expectations about what sung speech can or does do. The formula for satisfying these expectations includes the repetitive elements of oral composition *and* performance. The repetitive elements of oral composition are evident in the abundant use of formula: formula are metrical or “musical” and evoke a recurring or “essential idea.” But what are the repetitive elements of oral performance? Are these elements reducible to what we call “performative elements”—gesture, intonation, facial expression, posture, and so on? If so, in what then lies the spontaneous character of oral performance? On Nagy’s account, oral storysingers perform like the tragic and comic actors to come: their body movements echo and emphasize *the drama of their words*. This would mean, however, that the performative element of “sung speech” is no more or less than an “acting out” of the language of “sung speech.”

While Nagy’s emphasis on performance is crucial to oral poetic performance and our understanding of it, it is also crucial to consider our understanding of performance and the performative elements of speech. For instance, one of the obvious differences between speech and writing is that while speech is an embodied communicative act, writing is a disembodied form of communication that awaits a reader. This distinction founds an industry of communicative analyses in part pioneered by J. L. Austin’s focus on speech acts. Speech acts are *prima facie* performative because they are embodied: speech is inclusive of body posture, gesture, intonation, pause, rhythm, cadence, tone of voice, and emphasis. The sound of a speaker’s tone and emphasis, and the immediate visual affect of gesture and posture are difficult—if not impossible—to imitate in writing. As Austin observes, many “features of spoken language are not reproducible readily in written language”¹⁴⁶ to the extent that between spoken and written communication something is lost in translation.

This notion that something is lost, however, reifies our basic assumptions about the differences between speech as immediate and writing as mediate or mediated. For even in spoken conversation do we not *read* performative elements, mediating—as it were—gesture and body language through verbal content? Consider how our understanding of a speaker's tone in spoken conversation relies upon our lending verbal shape to nonverbal affect: a raised voice signifies heightened emotion, perhaps anger or fear. Hearing or transcribing an appropriate emotion depends upon correctly interpreting the context of the utterance. Correctly interpreting the context of an utterance, however, depends upon *reading* its situation. While the utterance prompting “she said angrily” or “she said fearfully” can sound the same and so transcribing the sound to text requires interpretation, hearing anger or fear is also a process of translating what “fits a given situation,” i.e., what makes sense in context rather than, essentially, what is heard.

In other words, we insist that communication, in order to be communication, confer intelligibility. Yet intelligibility always comes at the behest of context, and context, according to Austin, denotes the “accompaniments and circumstances” of any utterance. These accompaniments and circumstances might form a pre- or nonverbal background against or upon which an utterance occurs, but any utterance is unintelligible without its context. Speech acts are acts, therefore, only in terms of our ability to read speech within a context, and “context,” besides being a thoroughly literate term of art, denotes a set of skills particular to literate practices. In this way, the performative elements we think distinguish speech from writing are actually literate elements by which we understand speech.

We can, then, claim that utterance—speech—cannot be a possible object for study, but not because it is idiosyncratic or “anecdotal.”¹⁴⁷ To the contrary, what we call performative elements operate at a level of silent speech: they are understood and “heard” only in relation to the words—the signs—they act out. Although utterances *contain*, or are in part comprised by, physical and physiological elements,¹⁴⁸ the meaning of utterances are *prima facie* linguistic. Throwing one's hands in the air means “I give up,” and rolling one's eyes means “I don't believe this.” Hence, “how we say” is immediately identified as “what

we say” and the “what” is always a word or a phrase.¹⁴⁹ Performative elements, then, are embodied echoes of linguistic utterances: they are not idiosyncratic or anecdotal, but *as* intelligible they are representations of a context within a larger context or narrative.

In this way, we might be led to believe that an oral poetic performance is a nonverbal representation of the verbal content of oral composition, i.e., oral performances *represent* oral compositions. The repetition of verse entails the repetition—or ritualization—of bodily movements, and so an oral poet’s gestures and facial expressions are subject to the formula of dactylic hexameter. True, oral verse-making is composed in or as performance, but performance is regulated by its representational reliability in context of the entire collection of tales—*muthos*.

Alternatively, speakers who for the most part do not, or cannot write are hard pressed to distinguish between the verbal and nonverbal elements of their speech: in the absence of a media that abstracts sound from sense, how would one differentiate between the performative elements of speech and the meaning of speech?¹⁵⁰ Moreover, speakers who for the most part do not, or cannot write are hard pressed to distinguish between the act of speaking and language *per se*, between *parole* and *langue*. It is more likely that what we identify as the repetitive (i.e., identical) elements of oral composition do not—or do not have to—translate to ritualized expressions as performance. An oral poet’s body need not—can not—be the visible material that his song is written upon because oral verse-making does not represent an image of the real.

To the contrary, prior to Xenophon and Plato, an archaic “sign”—for which the Greek term is, loosely, *sema*—might not be understood as an image of the real “being” that speaking is about:

Before images were counterfeit copies of external things, they were symbols or signs (*sema*) that could make present what is normally invisible. Instead of representation through images, *semata* present or *re-present*—actualize *hic et nunc*—what is normally or not momentarily visible.¹⁵¹

While for us signs represent or reflect some “thing” or some “being,” *semata* for the archaic Greeks present or “make real” some “being.”

The difference between representing and “making real” can be understood in terms of the difference between how signs and *semata* function. For us, the efficacy of a sign consists in its representational reliability, consistency—e.g. its selfsame identity—in relation to “what” or to “whom” it refers. That is, a sign must be fixed in some relation to its referent to become meaningful because signs, by themselves, are not meaningful.¹⁵²

The efficacy of *semata*, however, need not maintain representational reliability, consistency—or selfsame identity—in relation to “what” or to “whom” *semata* refer because *semata* do not, as do signs, point to or refer to some x. Rather *semata* are x, or *semata* function as x.

While we understand formulaic diction and performance in terms of how it preserves and sustains a written narrative called *muthos*, archaic Greeks experience sung speech as Xenophanes experiences a rainbow: they behold. Moreover, the what or the who they behold cannot be reduced to the instrumentality we associate with ritual. Sung speech no more guarantees the presence of the divine than a shrug or a smile guarantees the behavior of a person. What sung speech can and does do is encourage *something like* metaphorical communication. According to Donald Davidson, the purpose of a metaphor is to encourage us to see something in a new light, yet:

What we notice or see is not, in general, propositional in character . . . if I show you Wittgenstein’s duck-rabbit, and I say, “It’s a duck”, then with luck you see it as a duck; if I say, “It’s a rabbit”, you see it as a rabbit. But no proposition expresses what I have led you to see. Perhaps you have come to realize that the drawing can be seen as a duck or as a rabbit. But one could come to know this without ever seeing the drawing as a duck or as a rabbit. *Seeing as is not seeing that.*¹⁵³

While “seeing that” is appropriate to our theory of signification, “seeing as” seems more appropriate to the communicative force of *semata* and the dynamics of sung speech. In sung speech, as Detienne reminds us, “the language of words is constantly intermeshed with the language of actions.”¹⁵⁴ These actions comprise the performative elements of “sung speech.” These performative elements, however,

cannot be understood as a gesturing or posturing between two or more representations—between a duck and a rabbit, as it were; rather, the actions of the oral poet are just those attempts to “lead us to see” what cannot be expressed propositionally, i.e., in statements.

Sung speech is a communicative practice that persists in oral form for at least half a millennia without the need or means for making statements. This is not too surprising, however, when we consider that first writing also does not *contain* statements. First writing preserves the verbal rhythm of oral poetry. The connective tissues of verbal rhythm are not copulas but sounds; dactyls, spondees. It is not appropriate, then, to say of sung speech that its nonverbal elements—its performative elements—embody and act out the drama of the tales. For this is to say that the poet’s body represents the poet’s language. While we are habituated to use our bodies as texts, within a culture in which texts for the most part do not exist, there is no reason to assume that oral performance has no communicative purpose of its own.¹⁵⁵

Or, rather, there is no reason to assume the communicative purpose of oral performance echoes the verbal content of oral composition since neither oral composition nor oral performance is representational and referential. To the contrary, oral composition and performance are *reverential*. Sung speech is a communicative practice that celebrates the possibility of what Jean-Pierre Vernant calls “true communication” or “authentic contact” with the divine. While ordinary human language functions in terms of signs, sung speech functions as *semata*. The purpose of sung speech is not overly surprising, however, when we consider that it is “a part of *physis*.” For what more than nature abides in a cycle of what “was, is, and always will be” and what more than nature promises continual renewal? Moreover, *physis* is *that* constant source of renewal which, according to the origin of sung speech, prompts the prophet’s praise. Hence *physis*, too, is a source of *semata*: unlike modern signs archaic *semata* are not only linguistic but are also natural. And so in the presence of a rainbow, Xenophanes beholds.

What Xenophanes does not do, however, is name a rainbow. Rather, he relieves a rainbow of her name: Iris. Nor does Xenophanes once proclaim his name in the entirety of his writings: he employs the *autos* I, which we might infer as “I, Xenophanes,” but this could also be the

“I” of anyone who reads, repeats, or hears this fragment. When we also consider that in the forty-two dialogues we attribute to him, Plato does not explicitly identify himself by name, the notion—or lack thereof—of authorial or artistic agency and ownership in ancient Greek experience must be reevaluated. Even the Muses are collectively identified as Muse, and their so-called names, like the names of some gods and goddesses, signify both an entity and a capacity: *metis*, *themis*, *mousa*, *kleos*, etc. Add to this that the one god “greatest among gods and men,” the “Father of All,” and even “Zeus” have no representational, i.e., lexical, value, and the enigma of the name to the communicative practices of sung speech becomes apparent.

While I would argue that the collective character of sung speech can and does persist in its written form, it cannot sustain the weight of a name. If signatures mark the beginning of the practice of naming, then their material fact might indicate an emerging awareness of agency as Detienne suggests. But in this way, it is not writing *per se* but the name that marks the beginning of the end of sung speech. Consider that names afford us an epistemological shorthand—a linguistic grasp on the world that is as tenuous or firm as the representational reliability of the name. That is, when I name a bloom a rose I cut off bloom from rose and push forward not from the thing, a bloom, but from its name, rose. If I distinguish between a pygmy rose and a miniature rose, I narrow the scope of the rose to a more specific name. Even if I incorrectly name the rose—it is actually a hybrid tea rose—the practice of naming makes possible a certain type of world. This could be a world of genus and species or phyla and *ousia*; the categories or the rankings matter not as much as the connections that circuitously and continually refer and defer to the name: rose. Hence, a rose comes to represent—stand in for—all the characteristics reduced from the world to its being; the being of the “rose,” collapsed as it were in its name. Names, then, divide up the world into increasingly narrower worlds. Whether these worlds interact or interpenetrate, any account of the world that is articulated can, and has been, disarticulated,¹⁵⁶ i.e., determined false, or as the ancient Greeks might say, forgotten.

Chapter 5

Parmenides' Poem

The Proem

There is general consensus among those who read, analyze, interpret, teach, and translate Parmenides' poem that it is indeed a poem, but one comprised of three disparate—perhaps incommensurable—parts: the proem, the Way of Truth, and the Way of Seeming. Almost every undergraduate student required to read Parmenides hears an account of the three parts similar to: the proem represents the mythical or allegorical aspect of Parmenides' text while the Way of Truth is philosophy's first written instance of a deductive proof of the attributes of Being. In contrast, the Way of Seeming—poorly and barely preserved—is an odd cosmology, a *doxa*, invented or repeated by Parmenides to distinguish it from the Way of Truth.

While Alexander Mourelatos' groundbreaking *A Route to Parmenides* successfully challenges the incommensurability between the three parts of Parmenides' poem, it is still standard to translate, anthologize, and interpret the parts of the poem as thematically dissonant, to say the least. Scholars and philosophers who admit "The modern collocations 'The Way of Truth' and 'The Way of Seeming' have no textual basis either in the poem or in other ancient sources"¹⁵⁷ are still compelled to visually demarcate and label the text into these parts. Doing so conveys our general sense of how to dispose ourselves to Parmenides: he begins by mimicking *muthos* in order to transcend it with *logos*—the truth about Being. As such, Parmenides' "Way of Truth" comprises our first formal invocation to metaphysics. Although this is a "truth" we have yet to fully comprehend, the "handy labels" we use to divide up the poem convey what everyone knows and what everyone says about Parmenides. Hence, the three parts of the poem illustrate, as Xenophanes might say, our prevailing opinion.

If a student is curious to look further into the three parts of the poem she will find that the first part of the poem comprises thirty-two lines preserved *in their entirety* by Sextus Empiricus and called, collectively, the Proem—from the Latin *prooemium*, a “preliminary comment” or “prelude.” As *preliminary* we infer that the proem establishes what is to come; it sets a stage or a tone, as it were. Although some philosophers have argued for the significance of the proem, few have concluded that how the poem begins is integral to the philosophical message and intent of the entire poem. The general and traditional consensus is that the proem is “allegorical.” The proem establishes the setting, characters, and themes of the poem. Setting, character, and theme are literary concerns, and literary concerns are traditionally conceived as “narrative” rather than argumentative. If we wish to examine the arguments of the poem, we must look past the proem. To quote Cornford, “We need not linger over the allegorical proem,”¹⁵⁸ i.e., we need not linger over the proem *because* it is “allegorical” and there is not much in “allegory” or “narrative” which is philosophically important.

Still, there is considerable debate over *what* the proem is an allegory. To quote Patricia Curd, “It seems clear that the proem has an allegorical aspect, but it is not clear what the allegory is *about*.”¹⁵⁹ Alexander Mourelatos, for one, wonders whether the Homeric motif of a “quest” that is introduced in the proem serves as a metaphor for Parmenides’ own, more intellectual, purpose. Eric Havelock suggests that Parmenides’ proem intentionally alludes to Hesiod’s *Theogony* and Homer’s *Odyssey*, and these allusions are significant to the message of the poem.¹⁶⁰ Werner Jaeger and others alternatively suggest that the proem is intentionally spiritual or religious and thus is important for understanding the poem’s meaning. Hence, there are valuable elements in the proem and the interpretations of these elements imply that they are significant to the intent and purpose of the entire poem. Indeed, allusions to the epics, the motif of a “quest,” and religious associations are indicated or occur throughout fragment B19. So, at least some of the content of the proem is reiterated throughout the *entire poem*. From where, then, comes the idea that the proem is unworthy of analysis?

Cornford’s suggestion that we “need not linger” over the proem most likely derives from a post-Platonic distinction between philosophy and poetry, or in archaic terms, between *logos* and *muthos*. During the

Greek archaic period philosophy as *logos* begins to emerge from that "collection of tales" Aristotle retrospectively calls *muthos*. Since *logos* represents a different way of speaking and thinking, *logos* is distinguished from *muthos*, and the one who speaks *logos*, the *sophos*, is distinguished from the one who speaks *muthos*, the poet. If the proem represents the mythical or poetic dimension of Parmenides' work, then it is correct to conclude that the proem represents a different way of speaking and thinking from the *logos* of other fragments. But this would also mean that when composing and performing the proem the "venerable and terrible" *sophos* of the "Way of Truth" is only playing the part of a traditional poet, i.e. mimicking a bard.

This is a conclusion, however, that is difficult to warrant because the "ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry" we assume is manifest in Parmenides' work is not supported by Parmenides' text. A. H. Coxon shows that only five terms in the vocabulary of the fragments we possess of Parmenides' poem are *not Homeric*, or not Homeric in the sense they appear in the written version of the epics.¹⁶¹ Even if we assume Parmenides is a reader rather than a hearer of oral poetry, his dependence upon formulaic diction is evident throughout the entire poem. Moreover, the terms *muthos* and *logos* or their derivatives are heard only five times in Parmenides' text: in B2 the goddess says: "Come, I shall tell you, and do you listen and convey the story" (μυθον), and in B8, "A single story of a route still is left" (μυθοσ). At B1, "Coaxing her with gentle words" (λόγοίσιν), at B6, "It must be that what is there for speaking" (λέγειν), and at B7, "but judge by reasoning" (λόγῳ). Hence, the terms we use to characterize different parts of Parmenides' poem are scarce within the poem and interspersed equally between the proem and the "Way of Truth." Also, the goddess refers to her speaking twice in the "Way of Truth" (B2–B8) and both times she says it is a story: at B2, "Come I shall tell you and do you listen and convey the story" (i.e., that we call the "Way of Truth") and at B8, "A single story of a route still is left . . ." (i.e., that we call the "Way of Seeming"). The goddess, then, does not refer to her speech as *logos* in the part of the poem we deem representative of a transition from *muthos* to *logos*.

Contrary, then, to Plato's remark in one dialogue, in explicitly one instance,¹⁶² distinguishing philosophy from poetry in the ancient world is complicated by the fact that even as late as the fourth century

the distinction between *logos* and *muthos*, and the one who speaks each, is not consistently maintained in what we determine to be philosophical writing. Plato's "Socrates" and Plato's "Protagoras" tell, or are inspired to tell, "myths" that put forward philosophical positions. One might even say that in the *Symposium* and in the *Phaedrus* "Socrates" stands to "Diotima" and to his "*daimonon*" as the *kouros* in Parmenides' poem stands to his goddess: both "Socrates" and the "youth" receive and convey an authoritative or divinely inspired speech. In the section we designate the "proem," Parmenides' "youth" says:

And the goddess received me kindly, and took my right hand with her hand,

And uttered speech and thus addressed me: Youth attended by immortal charioteers, Who come to our House with mares that carry you,

Welcome . . . (B1.22–6)¹⁶³

It is crucial to note that the goddess begins to speak in the otherwise "mythical" proem.

When attempting to understand Parmenides' poem, then, is it correct to assume a distinction between *muthos* and *logos*? If so, how do we justify this assumption given that the *goddess begins to speak in the proem* and continues to speak through the "Way of Seeming"? Then again, perhaps the transition from *muthos* to *logos* that occurs in Parmenides' poem is indicated by a change in character or "narrative voice" and *not by a change* in a particular style or type of speech? That is, in interpreting Parmenides' poem we might ask not only "What is being said?" but also "Who is speaking?"—"Whose words are these?"

The presence of a goddess lends itself to analyses that focus on the "religious" significance of the proem and, often, a search for the proper name of the goddess. That is, if we can discover who Parmenides' goddess is we can better map Parmenides' thought onto religious or irreligious references in ancient Greek experience, and thereby better ascertain the direction or "route" of his thought. Candidates for the correct name of the goddess include Wisdom, Themis, Nature, Truth, Peitho, Aphrodite, Persephone (*kore*), and even Night—a counselor to Zeus who abides among the souls of the dead. While all names seem plausible within a certain interpretation

of the proem, it is certainly not insignificant that neither the goddess nor the youth *name themselves or are so named* throughout the entire poem. Epithets for "the goddess" are *δαίμονος*, in the genitive "of the goddess" or nominative, *ω θεά*, "the goddess." The "youth" is referred to once by the goddess, *ω κοῦρ*, and even when the goddess seemingly refers to herself she says *ἔγων ἔρέω*—"I shall tell you"—or *εἰμὲν ἀταρπόν*—"I point out to you," etc. The *kouros* refers to himself as *με* in "that carry me," or *ἔπει μ' ἔς*, "were taking me." In this way, all references to the "characters" of the poem are intermeshed with an activity, a doing or a being done to: "I tell," "I point out," "I begin," "I return," or "carry me," "taking me." True to the oral poetic tradition, then, the speech of the goddess and the youth constitutes "a language of words constantly intermeshed with a language of actions."¹⁶⁴ In this way, to listen to the poem is to never hear the name of the characters who speak. Rather we are only told what these characters do.

What the youth and the goddess do are also best understood *in the terms* of the proem. For the proem establishes that the youth is under a supernatural directive; he is the recipient of the speech of a goddess. In order to receive this speech, the youth must journey from the "House of Night" and into the "House" of the goddess. During this journey the youth is conveyed in a chariot and escorted by the "Daughters of the Sun," otherwise known as "immortal charioteers." Describing this journey, the youth tells us:

There are the gates of the paths of Night and Day.

And a lintel and a threshold of stone surround them, And the aetherial gates themselves are filled with great doors; And for these Justice, much-avenging, holds the keys of retribution. Coaxing her with gentle words, the maidens Did cunningly persuade her that she should push back the bolted door for them Swiftly from the gates; and these made of the doors A gaping gap as they were opened wide, Swinging in turn in their sockets the brazen posts Fitted with rivets and pins; straight through them at that point.

Did the maidens drive the chariot and mares along the broad way. (B1.11–21)

From this passage, we suppose that the youth is engaged in a type of journey. But is this journey specifically a religious initiation? Such

an association can be supported by the little we know about ancient religious initiatory practices. In as much as initiation represents one's spiritual journey from darkness to enlightenment, the youth's physical journey, which begins with his departure from the "House of Night," certainly sounds *to us* like an allusion to religious initiation.¹⁶⁵ Then again, many of the arguments for the "religious" significance of the proem *presuppose* its "allegorical" or "mythical" character. Guthrie, for instance, suggests that the *allegorical character* of the proem is indicative of a type of "spiritual journey" associated with ancient shamanism; a tradition which includes "legendary figures like Aithalides, Aristeeas, Abaris, and Epimenides."¹⁶⁶ If Guthrie is correct, then the proem describes an instance of the youth's soul leaving his body to attain superhuman knowledge in and from a higher realm.

There are, however, at least two difficulties with this image of the *kouros*. First, there is no textual evidence for the elevation or ascent of the "youth." He is carried "as far as impulse might reach" and "upon the much speaking route," but whether this "route" ascends upward, or—as with Empedocles—descends downward¹⁶⁷ or proceeds horizontally as if along a road or a "route," is unspecified. We assume spatial and temporal attributes for the journey, but of this journey we are only told: "There are the gates of the paths of Night and Day."¹⁶⁸

Second, the relationship between allegory and shamanism—or initiation—is mutually exclusive. If the proem is shamanistic or initiatory, then it must be heard as articulating an actual experience, i.e., an experience the shaman or initiate believes to *have happened*—past tense—even if we do not share his belief. Although a shamanistic experience is communicated through imagery, the experience itself is not imaginary but real. If this is the case, however, then it is difficult also to maintain that the proem is allegorical. Allegory—in the modern sense—is a poetic or symbolic attempt to communicate meaning through the narration of events that never did or will occur. And so, either the proem is religious or it is allegorical, but it cannot be both. Moreover, when we recall that *semata* act as *x* and *y* rather than as signs about *x* and *y*, the temporal assumptions our representational facility with language make possible, e.g. that speech is about something that did or will happen, do not fit the character of *semata* as components of a speech that makes real what it says. Nor do our

assumptions fit the character of sung speech as speech that is an event—a happening—itself.

Central to our interpretations of the significance of the proem, then, might be our various dispositions to its poetic content, i.e., its Homeric language. To assume the proem is allegory is to assume the proem is false, or as false as *muthos* is false. Alternatively, to assume the proem is shamanistic is to accord the proem a degree of truth that awkwardly—if at all—translates to the practice of philosophy on the one hand, *and* the practice of sung speech on the other. While Paul Veyne maintains that our longstanding tradition of “allegorical exegesis” emerges from philosophical “alterations of truth,” it is difficult to conceive how a sixth-century poet could determine for himself the alternative meaning of myth since “truth” for the archaic Greeks is not, or not only, representational and so capable of “alteration.” To the contrary, ancient Greek philosophers, like ancient Greek oral poets, do not claim *for themselves* an experience of the real or divine. Rather, the immediate and collective character of sung speech obtains throughout the institution of philosophy to the extent that if a work was composed or constituted as a written text, it was nevertheless read aloud to an audience. This means the poem that we read—often silently—in fragments and parts was originally spoken in its entirety before an audience.¹⁶⁹ Just who this audience is remains an open question but since Parmenides’ “use” of formulaic diction is replete throughout the entire poem, it follows that his audience consists of those who, as Havelock would say, know their Homer “by heart.” Thus, the most useful references we possess *must* be the epics we attribute to Homer and Hesiod.

Havelock, for one, suggests that Parmenides’ purpose in the proem is to recall the imagery and setting of specific episodes in Homer’s epics, and that Parmenides’ youth is meant to be understood in comparison with the heroic Odysseus and Achilles.¹⁷⁰ Since Parmenides and his audience readily understand a reference to axles, the sound of pipes, and the swinging open of great doors as formulaic, the proem prompts an association between the scenes and themes of Homer’s epics and the journey of Parmenides’ youth.

Havelock further suggests that these references are not merely ornamental; rather, they help explain the philosophical intent of the

poem. For instance, Havelock interprets the goddess' discussion of routes of inquiry as a reference to the shipwreck of Odysseus' crew in the *Odyssey*, Book XII. At B6 in Parmenides' poem, the goddess says:

For <I restrain> you from that first route of inquiry,

And then also from this one, on which mortals knowing nothing
Wander two-headed; for helplessness in their Breasts guides their
distracted mind; and they are carried

Deaf and blind alike, dazed, uncritical tribes . . . the path of all
alike is backward-turning. (B6.3–9)

According to Havelock, the goddess' warning is reminiscent of "the advice of Odysseus to his helmsman" (138). Prior to being separated from his crew, Odysseus advises his helmsman to keep straight to the course for home. Nevertheless, within sight of their port the crew opens a bag of winds that blow them back out to sea; hence, the journey of Odysseus' crew is "reversed" or as the goddess in Parmenides' poem says "backward-turning." Moreover, in their wanderings and attempts to return home, Odysseus' crew commit an act of impiety for which they are all later drowned. Thus, within sight of the end of their journey the crew, failing to heed Odysseus' advice, are forced back to sea and they spend the rest of their short lives wandering as if "two headed . . . helplessness in their breasts guid[ing] their distracted minds." Is Parmenides warning us, Havelock asks, of the destructive consequences of following the wrong route? (139).

Havelock cautions against mapping the *Odyssey* onto Parmenides' poem and *vice versa*, yet maintains that we should take Parmenides' references as intentional and direct. Although it is true that the goddess admonishes the youth from taking improper or useless routes for thinking three times prior to B8, each admonition is articulated as an apparent distinction between two very different ways: the "Way of Truth" and the "Way of Seeming." Some scholars wonder, however, why the goddess includes the "Way of Seeming" since she prefaces this "Way" as a "deceitful ordering of words." If we take the goddess' assertion that all thought is of what-is, and there is only what-is ". . . because the same thing is there for thinking and for being" (B3), then all thought is, in a sense, correct and there is no

reason for choosing one route over another, nor would there seem to be criteria for distinguishing between them:

Come, I shall tell you, and do you listen and convey the story,
 What routes of inquiry alone there are for thinking:
 The one—*is*, and *cannot not be*,
 Is the path of Persuasion (for it attends upon truth);
 The other—*is not* and that *needs must not be*,
 That I point out to you to be a path wholly unlearnable,
 For you could not know what-is-not (for that is not feasible),
 Nor could you point it out. (B2.1–8)¹⁷¹

Lines B2.1–8 suggest that one is *not* persuaded nor advised to turn thought back from is-not, to keep or to steer to the right course because thought is only and always of what-is. So the suggestion that there is a choice between routes seems, at best, superfluous.

Does the image of the shipwreck help explain why the goddess puts forward these two routes and then, in turn, seems to deny the possibility or plausibility of following one of them? While Havelock's analogy between the shipwreck of Odysseus' crew and the warning of Parmenides' goddess seems true to both texts, the shipwreck of Odysseus' crew denotes an abrupt end to their journey or "quest." Throughout Parmenides' poem, however, the terms for "quest" are reiterated thirteen times and alternating imagery of light and dark is repeated throughout the "Way of Seeming."¹⁷² We often assume, then, that images of light and dark are closely associated with the youth's "quest" even though this is a "quest" that continues throughout the poem. That is, the "Way of Truth" is conceived as a passage from Night into Day, or from darkness to illumination. Conversely, the "Way of Seeming" is associated with darkness since it is referred to by the goddess as the path of "mortal beliefs." Hence, contrary images of light and dark are associated with each of the two "Ways" and encourage us to compare, contrast, and distinguish the "Way of Truth" from the "Way of Seeming."

In this way, the "correct" route—"is, and cannot not be"—(B2.3) is often interpreted as the *destination* of the youth's journey and this destination is often conceived in terms of the imagery of the poem.

Since the youth departs from the “House of Night” (δῶματα Νυκτός) to arrive at the goddess’ “House,” we infer that the goddess’ house is one of “Light” or “Day.” Hence, the object of the youth’s quest is illumination or enlightenment, i.e. the “Way of Truth.”¹⁷³ But *nowhere in the entire poem* is the “House” of the goddess said to be full of light, shining or brilliant. We are told only that the goddess’ “House” lies through “the gates of the paths of Night and Day.” Yet if the goddess’ “House” lies through “the gates of the paths of Night and Day,” then it is surely incorrect to conceptualize her “House” as one of “Light” or “Day” in direct contrast to the youth’s “House of Night.”

In the terms of Havelock’s analogy, if the goddess is denying the plausibility of following the route “is-not,” then her words might constitute a forewarning. But if the goddess is denying the possibility of following the route “is-not,” then this route is closed off from the beginning and cannot constitute part of the youth’s “quest.” *The goddess, then, might not be warning the “youth”* as Odysseus warns his crew. Rather, she points out to the “youth” that this route is impossible to follow. While it is true that just as Odysseus survives his crew and continues his journey homeward, Parmenides’ “youth” is taken “far from the beaten track of men” and distinguished from those “carried, deaf and blind alike” along a route that is “backward-turning,” it is also true that *unlike Odysseus*, the destination of Parmenides’ “youth” *is and remains unspecified*.

Although our tendency to conflate the youth’s “quest” with images of “illumination” is understandable given some of the imagery of the proem, it is, nonetheless, implausible given what the “youth” says in the proem. This creates for us a slippery interpretative situation: (1) we possess an abundance of scholarship that insists upon demarcating the arguments of the “Way of Truth” from the proem, but, (2) we continue to associate the imagery of the proem with these arguments. Alternatively, perhaps the reason Parmenides does not make an explicit comparison between the youth’s departure from the “House of Night” to the goddess’s “House” as one “of Light” or “of Day” is that *we are not to think of the youth’s quest as one from darkness to light*; rather we are to think of the youth’s quest or journey as one which lies through “the gates of the paths of Day and Night.” To be

able to accompany the youth, then, we must try to think *through* these images in terms of what we are told.

We are told, for instance, where the goddess' "house" is; it lies through "the gates of the paths of Night and Day." Justice must be "coaxed with gentle words" by the Daughters of the Sun to let the youth pass through the gates. Once through the gates, the youth is escorted to the goddess' "House." Since the goddess' "House" is on the other side of the gates, *through* "the gates of the paths of Night and Day," how can we suppose that what is through the gates is either Day or Night? To the contrary, if we attend to the entire poem we recognize that the goddess actually prevents us from making these associations. For, in the third part of the poem we call the "Way of Seeming," night is described as "grave, firm, full, tight."¹⁷⁴ These characteristics of night correspond to the list of attributes of "*esti*" in the beginning of B8 in the "Way of Truth." Likewise, light in the "Way of Seeming" is characterized as "fire" and "color-play" (244), each of which is associated with "marks of unreality" toward the end of the "Way of Truth." It cannot be the case, then, that the youth is singularly destined "for the light" or the dark: both are characteristic of what we call the "Way of Truth" *and* the "Way of Seeming."

That "the topography of the poem is confusing," that it is "blurred beyond recognition," and so "there is no route that can be identified"¹⁷⁵ is puzzling or troubling only if we assume the proem is indeed an *prooemium*, i.e., only if we assume *for it* a preliminary yet insignificant purpose. To the contrary, the proem alerts us that the youth's "journey" takes him through "the gates of the paths of Night and Day." Once through the gates, it seems the youth's journey ends *as he reaches* the goddess' "House." For it is upon arrival at the goddess' "House" that the youth's speech ends and the goddess' speech begins. Although the youth's journey takes him through "the gates of the paths of Night and Day," the youth's "quest" centers on the goddess' speech, and this is a speech *completely devoid of names*. Just as the goddess does not name or describe herself or the "House" in which she abides, neither does the goddess name the subject of her speech. Perhaps this is the quest for all who hear the goddess' speech: for hers is a *muthos* without names.

Muthos as Logos

That I find a lack of names in Parmenides' poem startling makes evident my own deep commitment to the representational character of speech and writing to the extent that it is difficult to conceive whether and how a story without names is a story at all. That is, names are nouns—persons, places, things—without which it is seemingly impossible to grasp the “what happens” of any tale regardless of whether such a tale is read or heard. This situation is particularly acute with regard to Parmenides because more than any other of the early *sophoi* Parmenides composes and performs with hexameter verse, the verse of *muthos*. Moreover, the goddess calls her speech a story: “Come I shall tell you and do you listen and convey the story . . .” Since the goddess tells us this is a story of or about the routes for thinking, we suppose this is a story about what—or perhaps how—to think. But a story about what to think within which *the what* is unspecified does not sound to us like much of a story. Then again, the elements of *muthos*—its authorless and collective character organized by an audible rhythm originating in divine memory—also jar our expectations for what we might call the purpose and pleasure of storytelling.

That the ancients did not—or did not only—attend to their stories with the same expectations we attend to our own, however, is documented in Aristotle's analysis of tragedy. True, Aristotle's mention of *muthos* as a “collection of tales” in the *Poetics* encourages us to read ancient Greek myth as stories. We understand these stories as a collection, as thematically consonant in terms of their subject matter, i.e., the exploits or actions of gods and men. But also within the *Poetics* Aristotle's mention of *muthos* alongside tragedy alerts us to the necessity of plot to any story. That is, the most important element of tragedy, according to Aristotle, is action, and of a skillfully composed tragedy “single action”:

. . . but he [Homer] constructed his Odyssey round a single action in our sense of the phrase. And the Iliad the same. As then in other arts of representation¹⁷⁶ single representation means a representation of a single object, so too the plot being a representation of a piece of action must represent a single piece of action and the whole of it; and the component incidents must be arranged so that

if one of them be transposed or removed, the unity of the whole is dislocated and destroyed. For if the presence or absence of a thing makes no visible difference, then it is not an integral part of the whole.¹⁷⁷

According to Aristotle, at least, the art of *muthos*, like the art of tragedy, presents "a single piece of action" that reverberates the whole. Plot, then, is not a series of actions that culminates in a single action, i.e., Oedipus' self-immolation or Odysseus' battle with the suitors, but more subtly each action represents the "general sense" of the "whole" of action: the plot. I take this to mean that in a skillfully composed story, all elements are not just relevant but necessary; all elements are "an integral part of the whole." Hence, the "what" of what happens is actually a single event rather than a sequence or series, and this implies that the characters who act are less important than the action or event itself.

Aristotle's disposition to and experience of a "story," then, could be significantly different from our own. For us, *muthos* does indeed tell a story; in fact, preliminary summaries of the *plot of each Book* often accompany modern translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. These summaries orient readers to the scenes or episodes of the epics that *contribute to the overall narrative* of the Trojan War or the adventures of Odysseus. As orally composed and performed, however, such summaries obviously do not exist. Moreover, what we might sidestep when studying and discussing the myths as stories is Aristotle's insight into the secondary significance of character in ancient tales. While we might suppose that characters make stories happen, that Oedipus and Odysseus are agents whose speech reveals their "thought" and their "thought" entail their actions, Aristotle's insight is to the contrary: plot is not only narratively but logically prior to character. In the ancient world, at least, the significance of a story is less upon who is acting—who is doing or being done to—and more upon what is happening: the plot. In this way, the nameless character of Parmenides' poem is compatible with the authorless, collective character of sung speech: in Parmenides' poem it is less significant who the goddess and the youth are than what happens.

Moreover, the "handy labels" by which we separate the poem into *disparate* parts is incompatible with Aristotle's analysis of the "unity of

the whole.” If we take Aristotle’s analysis as indicative of an ancient understanding of the practice and purpose of storytelling, a modern reader who chooses to isolate one passage or part of Parmenides’ poem as more or less significant than any other must show why and how other passages and parts are “not an integral part of the whole.” Or, a modern reader must show why and how Parmenides’ poem is not skillfully composed, i.e., is indeed the type of story in which “component incidents” can and should be “transposed or removed.” To warrant either or both of these claims, however, requires a modern reader to impose a certain experience and understanding of how stories work upon Parmenides’ text. That a story must be about someone or something that can be represented in other terms, e.g., in terms of discussion or analysis, replicates a representational facility with language. That words, images, and tones stand in for nonlinguistic entities like objects, states of affairs, and even feelings, is simply *written into* our orientation to meaning and meaning making practices. And so a story is a representation *about or of* something that has come to stand for something else. Whether we can attribute this to Plato or not, for us a story is never the thing itself but is always a certain remove from the truth.¹⁷⁸ Yet, since ancient Greek *semata* function as x and as y rather than as signs about x and about y, stories composed as *semata* are not of or about anything other than the what of “what is said”: *muthos* happens rather than reports what did or will happen. And so judgments about Parmenides’ poem and poetic skills must take into consideration the nonrepresentational elements of *muthos* and *logos* appropriate to Parmenides’ time. Doing this, however, initially requires a reconsideration of our prevailing views of language, i.e., those views that make stories representational for us.

Along these lines and among recent accounts of Parmenides’ philosophical-poem, Martin Heidegger’s is particularly sensitive to the possibility that our prevailing views of language need to be reexamined and reevaluated if we are to begin to “hear” what the ancients tell us. Moreover, if our prevailing views of language need to be reexamined, so too might our prevailing views about truth ill fit ancient Greek *aletheia*. That is, since “truth”—for us—is generally said to be a property of statements, and statements are generally considered to be both the basic units of language and linguistic

functions,¹⁷⁹ if Parmenides is operating with a view of language not entirely like our own, he may also be operating with a view of "truth" rather different from ours.

Heidegger writes that his path to early Greek thinkers was initially "covered over" or "concealed" by "truth":

What I then said in *Being and Time* about *aletheia* already goes in this direction. *Aletheia* as unconcealment had already occupied me, but in the meantime "truth" came in between.¹⁸⁰

By "truth came in between" Heidegger refers to our history of truth, i.e., how ancient Greek *aletheia* was identified with the Latin *veritas* and eventually translated as the English "truth." The problem raised by these translations is not, or not only, one of scholarly misinterpretation. According to Heidegger, the very notion of misinterpretation is deeply rooted in a history of communicative practices and philosophical systems that separate us from Parmenides. If we are to begin to "hear" *aletheia* we must try to think through a history of concepts—specifically a "history of truth"—that in part forms our inheritance and understanding of ancient Greek philosophy.

As Heidegger comes to understand it, while on the one hand ancient Greek *aletheia* remains—for us—silent and unseen, on the other hand ancient Greek *aletheia* is constitutive of our ways of speaking and thinking truthfully. That is, we speak and think truthfully rather than speaking or thinking "the truth." So, while *aletheia* should not be unambiguously understood as truth, *aletheia* can serve to remind us of what we often "cover up" or "conceal" when we too quickly speak and think "of truth," or perhaps even, too quickly speak and think.¹⁸¹ Not surprisingly, then, Heidegger discusses ancient Greek *aletheia* as "unconcealment" or "unconcealedness."¹⁸²

Striking about Heidegger's analysis of "unconcealment" is his emphasis upon the privative *un*, i.e., "unconcealment." According to Heidegger, "unconcealment" points directly to a taking away or cancellation, possibly even an "annihilation of concealment" (16). In this manner "unconcealment" derives from "concealment," and this means that "unconcealment," logically speaking, is a negation of concealment (16). That *aletheia* might be a negation is contrary to

our usual ways of speaking and thinking about “truth”: “truth” is an affirmation, or the quality of an affirmation, but truth as such is not a privation or negation.¹⁸³ Indeed, one of our first explicit accounts “of truth” occurs in Aristotle’s *Categories*, Chapter 4, 2a4–10. And what Aristotle tells us here does not seem to correspond with the privative “un” in “unconcealment”:

None of the above [*kategoria*] is said just by itself in any affirmation, but by the combination of these with one another an affirmation is produced. For every affirmation, it seems, is either true or false; but of things said without any combination none is either true or false (e.g. “man”, “white”, “runs”, “wins”).¹⁸⁴

Terms, words, or “signs” spoken by themselves are neither true nor false, but—as Aristotle makes clear—affirmations *are* true or false. “Affirmations” or “things said in combination” are statements, and so, on Aristotle’s account, if only statements can be true or false, then truth as such is a property of statements.¹⁸⁵ But, and with a nod to Heidegger, is this the full extent of Aristotle’s account of truth?

Difficulties confronting modern interpretations of Aristotle’s *Categories* may result, at least in part, from our understanding of *kategoria* and their function. As John Anton observes, post-classical interpretations of Aristotle’s categorical doctrine more often than not place Aristotle’s doctrine “within ontological frameworks signally different from [Aristotle’s] own,” and these different frameworks are “made to solve philosophical problems Aristotle had not regarded crucial to his own investigations.”¹⁸⁶ What is crucial to Aristotle’s investigations in Chapter 4 of the *Categories* is what is required *to speak truthfully*, and yet these requirements demand more than what we often take the *Categories* to be, namely, an account of “simple predication.” That is, if Aristotle’s *kategoria* refer to simple or noncomplex predicates of place, quality, time, then speaking truthfully requires no more nor less than accurately assigning a predicate to a subject: e.g. “This cow is brown.” But if, as Anton suggests, *kategoria* “explicitly refer to ultimate units of signification” (184), and these “ultimate units” are not simple predicates *per se* but “well formed assertions” (206), then speaking truthfully requires a more comprehensive knowledge

of what we are ultimately talking about—*ousia*—so that when we speak we make correct *categorical assertions*. In this way, Aristotle's categories can be understood in conjunction with several of the other sciences, and the *kategoria* as "completed attributions whose function is to capture in *logos* the traits of beings" (184).¹⁸⁷

Although many post-classical interpretations of the doctrine of categories adopt the logical structure of affirmations, they simultaneously de-emphasize or dismiss the idea that the function of predication "is to capture in *logos* the traits of beings." We acknowledge that an affirmation is a statement and that a statement comprises and communicates a judgment. Up to this point we might be said to be in agreement with Aristotle. But if by "judgment" we mean a truth determination, and if by "truth" we mean a "correspondence" of a word to an object, or an "accordance" between a "meaning" and a "fact,"¹⁸⁸ then we have reduced the theory of categories to a "correspondence theory of truth or meaning."¹⁸⁹ While many contemporary philosophers criticize an account of "truth" or "meaning" based upon "correspondence" because such an account presupposes the self-evident character of "objects" and "facts," these criticisms "conceal"—or "cover up"—an ancient understanding of *logos*.

Logos, for an early Greek thinker, is not separable from being to the extent that speech can be judged to "correspond"—or not "correspond." For the early Greeks as well as for us, language is an instrument of communication. But for the early Greeks, the substance or foundation of language is *logos*.¹⁹⁰ Post-classical interpretations of the categories, and thereby post-classical accounts of "truth," tend to reduce *logos* to what is only language, and to contrast what is linguistic, such as statements and thoughts, with what is nonlinguistic, such as brute, dumb matter. In so doing, post-classical thinkers tend to deontologize linguistic functions. For an early Greek thinker, however, *logos* is not—or not only—a linguistic entity:

The Greek word that corresponds to our word "language" is *glossa*, "tongue." Language is *phone semantike*, a vocalization which signifies something. This suggests that language attains at the outset that preponderant character which we designate with the name "expression." This correct but externally contrived representation of

language, language as “expression,” remains definitive from now on . . . Once, however, in the beginning of Western thinking, the essence of language flashed in the light of Being—once, when Heraclitus thought the *Logos* as his guiding word, so as to think in this word the Being of beings.¹⁹¹

According to Heidegger, Heraclitus’ thought vanishes as abruptly as it appears: a lightning flash and “no one held onto its streak of light.” Yet, “no one held onto its streak of light” precisely because Heidegger conceives of *logos* as that which is primarily *seen rather than heard*. Citing Aristotle’s *De interpretatione*, Heidegger summarizes: “[This is] the classical construction . . . that harbors language as speech. Letters *show* sounds; sounds *show* affections in the soul; affections *show* the matters that impinge upon us.”¹⁹² Prior to the advent of writing, however, letters do not show sounds. To the contrary, the material character of first writing requires that sounds *be shown as* letters. The difference is negligible only if we continue to assume, as Derrida says we have, that writing is logically prior to speech, i.e., that a necessary condition of all communication is literate signification or representation. Rather, in his attempt to deliteralize our disposition to language, Heidegger relies upon Aristotle’s explication of the function of speech as *apophainesthai*¹⁹³ and determines that speech is that which from itself —*apo*—“lets us see”—*phainesthai*—what is being talked about:

In speech (*apophansis*), *insofar as it is genuine, what* is said should be derived *from* what is being talked about. In this way spoken communication, in what it says, makes manifest what it is talking about and thus makes it accessible to another. Such is the structure of *logos* as *apophansis*. (28–9, emphasis mine)

Unlike, perhaps, ordinary or instrumental speech, *logos* or genuine speech “makes manifest what it is talking about,” or in Heidegger’s later terminology, *logos* brings what it is talking about—*ousia*—to *presence*.¹⁹⁴ According to Aristotle, what we are ultimately talking about is *ousia*. While Heidegger understands *ousia* (generally “substance” or “being”) as *presence*, Heidegger’s analysis of *logos* as speech that

"makes present" complements, rather than deters us from, Aristotle's thinking. Even though Heidegger's *logos* is visually laden—"logos lets beings be seen"—the effect of Heidegger's and Aristotle's ideas upon our thinking might be similar: for both thinkers, *logos* provides access to beings rather than covering up or concealing beings in linguistic symbols. In terms of Aristotle's *kategoria* this access is to the traits of beings as such. For both thinkers, then, a difference between "ordinary" and genuine speech might be contrasted as follows: simple predications refer to, or represent, *x*'s in terms of *y*'s, but "well formed assertions" present *x*'s and *y*'s as a synthesis to speaker and listener alike. "Synthesis" need not, or need not only, "mean to connect and conjoin representations." According to Heidegger, "synthesis" can also mean, "to let something be seen in its *togetherness* with something, to let something be seen *as something*" (29). *Logos* as *apophansis* lets something be seen as something, and because *logos* lets something be seen it is *alethes*; *logos* takes beings out of their concealment.

That *alethes* is something seen, however, is reinforced by Heidegger's account of *aesthesis*. *Aisthesis*—"the simple sense perception of something"—is always *alethes*. "Looking," writes Heidegger, "always discovers colors, and hearing always discovers tones" (29). For looking, colors are its *idia*—what is its own—"the beings genuinely accessible through it and for it" (29). Sound is not accessible to looking, light is not accessible to hearing, but in so far as perception apprehends what is genuinely its own, it is pure *noein*—"straightforwardly observant apprehension of the being of beings" (29).

For Heidegger, Parmenides is guided by *noein*: "the simple apprehension of something objectively present in its pure objective presence"¹⁹⁵ (22). Unlike Xenophanes' apprehension of a rainbow, Parmenides apprehends "truth" in the speech of a goddess: Parmenides is guided by *noein* in the presentation of a divine *legein*. Moreover, it is not just the speech of the goddess that is said to be *alethes*—"truth"—but, according to Heidegger, the goddess is "truth." Or truth is, in Parmenides' poem, a goddess.

Of truth in Parmenides' poem,¹⁹⁶ however, the goddess tells us only twice that "[this path] attends upon truth," (B2.4) and that "[a route] is, and is true" (B8.18).¹⁹⁷ The bracketed terms "path," "route" remind us that these terms do not appear in the Greek text but that in context

Parmenides seems to use the term *aletheia* to describe or qualify a “path” or “route.” Since the two lines that contain *aletheia* occur at B2 and B8, the path or the route that “comes between” is collocated a “Way of Truth,” i.e. that “Way” that leads to a correct understanding of Being, the goal of the youth’s quest. But, as David Gallop explains, “Nouns in the genitive case used with words for ‘route’ refer either to the traveler or to his divine guide . . . but not to ‘Truth’ . . . as constituting or defining the route(s) in question.”¹⁹⁸ Gallop’s observation implies that *aletheia* refers to the one traveling—the youth—or to the one guiding the traveler—the goddess—but *aletheia* does not refer to a “route” or “path” that is traveled. If the speech of the goddess is considered to be a “Way of Truth,” but a “way,” or “route,” or “path” cannot rightly be said to be “true,” then *aletheia*, as Heidegger suggests, might refer to the goddess, or perhaps even the youth.

Similarly, Mourelatos suggests that “truth” refers not to a route but to the goddess. He bases his suggestion upon complementary occurrences of the verb “attend” (*opedei*) in Homer and Hesiod. Given epical usage, Mourelatos argues that the “underlying sense” of “attends” is “to attach oneself to.”¹⁹⁹ Mourelatos understands that truth is attached or adheres to Persuasion, whom he identifies as the goddess herself: *Peitho*. If Mourelatos is correct, then the subject of the goddess’ speech is the goddess’ speech. That is, Persuasion is said to be a path to which truth attaches, but if the person who says this is Persuasion—the goddess—then the goddess’ references to paths and routes might be thinly disguised self-references to her own speech. The statement “The one route is” might be better understood as “(My) speech is.”²⁰⁰

In effect, then, Mourelatos and Heidegger personalize or personify the “truth” of the poem.²⁰¹ We might ask, then, is Parmenides, like Hesiod before him, personifying a noun—truth—and providing it with agency and activity—speech? If this is the case, then both philosophers are, in a sense, correct that truth, as such, is *experienced* in Parmenides’ poem as a goddess. This interpretation could also be considered consistent with the efficacious character of oral poetry. For just as *Mousa* indicates a divine power *and* the language and materials of “sung speech,” *Peitho* indicates a divine presence *and* the result or effect of that presence in speech: truth.

Then again, for both Heidegger and Mourelatos truth is something that is not self-evident. For Heidegger, truth must be unconcealed and for Mourelatos "the 'course of Persuasion' is also the course pursued by men who are sensitive to the *peitho* which the goddess *Peitho* herself has bestowed on the real."²⁰² That is, for both philosophers "truth" is something to be "pursued" and so a mortal must have a correct disposition to, or awareness of, "truth" if she is to be compelled by Persuasion. But if "truth" needs to be "unconcealed" or "pursued," then truth is obviously not readily present or available. Yet, without conclusive criteria for distinguishing correct from incorrect "courses of Persuasion," how is one to develop a proper disposition or awareness to "truth": how is one to know whether one is capable, or prepared, for such a "quest"?

Within the communicative practices of sung speech, however, neither the poet nor audience of an oral performance is "predisposed" to the presence of the divine in our sense of the term. "Predisposition" requires an individual and internal psychological motivation and expectation that seems contrary to the constant authority and public character of "sung speech." An oral poet can no more "call the gods down" than he can make a rainbow appear. "Authentic contact" or "true communication" happens by virtue of *kudos*, divine favor. Since divine favor is the "property" of the gods, there is no reason to assume that Parmenides believes there are certain criteria a person must meet prior to the bestowal of *kudos*.

To the contrary, it is a definitive lack of criteria that sustains the egalitarian character of sung speech, an event in which both poet and audience participate in a public pronouncement of the Muse. While the idea that truth is concealed or must be pursued does articulate the "inevitable tension" of ancient Greek experience of the divine, i.e., that the gods are always more than their presence makes known, I think we must at least question whether Parmenides would—or could—attempt to dispel such tension with something like a criteria or formula for truth that is ultimately contingent *not upon* what is said but who hears. For ushered through "the gates of the paths of Night and Day," the goddess says: "Come I shall tell you and do you listen and convey the story . . ." Through the gates, there

is no “objective presence” to be seen, no apophansis, i.e., no speech that lets the being of beings be seen. For through the gates *there is nothing for the youth to see, but there are words to hear, and of these words the goddess does command him: akousas—listen.*

The “Way of Truth”

The second part of Parmenides’ poem comprises between sixty-one and ninety-two lines depending upon the location of seven extant fragments that are preserved in hexameter couplets or isolated bits of verse. Sixty-one lines are preserved in their entirety by the NeoPlatonist Simplicius in the sixth century *after* the Common Era. These sixty-one lines constitute Fragment 8 which is commonly called “The Way of Truth,” although there is no evidence Simplicius named it such. Still, Fragment 8 is said to offer “the earliest example of an extended philosophical argument.”²⁰³ Introduction to this argument is generally said to begin immediately after the thirty-two-line Proem with the Fragment designated B2. In this way, the “Way of Truth” may or may not include part or all of Fragments 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. The sources for Fragments 2, 3, 4, and 5 are various: they include Simplicius but also Proclus, Clement, and Plotinus. Fragment 6, comprising nine lines, comes to us from Simplicius, but Fragment 7, comprising six lines, is a combination from Plato, Aristotle, and Sextus Empiricus.²⁰⁴ Within the “Way of Truth,” then, the exact locations of some of the fragments remain uncertain and it is only by appeal to the “preliminary” comments of the proem that they seem to fit into the “Way of Truth” at all. B2, for instance, follows the goddess’ welcome of the youth to her “House”:

Come, I shall tell you, and do you listen and convey the story,
 What routes of inquiry {*odoi mounai dizeis*} alone there are
 for thinking:
 The one—that [*it*] *is*, and that [*it*] *cannot not be*,
 Is the path of Persuasion, (for it attends upon truth). (B2.1–4)

Translators who bracket the neutral subject “it” alert us that “it” does not appear in the original Greek text. Yet, if we try to read or

listen to the passage without "it" or a similar "subject" the passage sounds and looks like:

Come, I shall tell you, and do you listen and convey the story,
 What routes of inquiry {*odoi mounai dizeis*} alone there are
 for thinking:
 The one—*is* and that *cannot not be*,
 Is the path of Persuasion, (for it attends upon truth)²⁰⁵

Without brackets, it seems that the reader or listener of Parmenides' poem must guess at the subject of *esti* "is." Our guesswork begins in B2, where *esti* seems to define or comprise the first, and perhaps only, route for the "youth" to follow. That is, since the goddess commands the youth "to listen and convey the story" of "routes of inquiry," it is quite customary for us to assume that the routes in question are the "subject" of her account. But, similar to the problem of attributing truth to a route, the idea that route can be the subject of the goddess' speech is precluded by what the goddess says in at least two ways. First, the notion that a "route" comprises the subject of *esti* is inconsistent with the articulations of *esti* in B8. Throughout B8, *esti* is understood to be (1) subjectless, or (2) in need of a subject, or (3) the subject of itself, i.e. "is" is. This third possibility proves one of the most difficult for modern ears and eyes. For us, at least, verbs follow and qualify nouns, but the syntactical and semantic relations of nouns to verbs preclude the possibility of intelligibly qualifying a noun of a verb: "Is route." While we might comprehend "Is route" and even attribute to this sentence a type of "poetic license," this does not change the fact that in our language this sentence is grammatically incorrect. Only by first recognizing that in the sentence "Is route" a noun mistakenly follows a verb are we able to adjust or adapt to the mistake and to hear or to read "Route is."

In this way, the inclusion of [it] helps us draw what we think to be the proper connection between the apparent subject—"route"—and the verb—"is." But—and second—in B8, not only do the terms for "route" and "path" drop away, all imagery in the form of a noun to which we could attribute the goddess' speech *as being about something* is absent.

A single story of a route still
 Is left: that *is*; on this there are signs
 Very numerous: that what-is is ungenerated and imperishable;
 Whole, single-limbed, steadfast, and complete;
 Nor was once, nor will be, since is, now, all together,
 One, continuous; for what coming-to-be of it will you seek?
 In what way, whence, did grow? Neither from what-is-not shall
 I allow
 You to say or think; for it is not to be said or thought
 That *is not*. And what need could have impelled it to grow
 Later or sooner, if it began from nothing?
 Thus must either be completely or not at all. (B8.1–11)²⁰⁶

Many scholars and philosophers would agree with Gallop's translation of the subject of *esti* as "what-is," i.e., "what-is" is. Although the "what" of "what-is" or "what-is-not" in lines B8.3 and B8.7 is not bracketed, "what-is" serves as a grammatical placeholder of translation. Other translations of B8.1–9 include:

One way remains to be spoken of: the way how it is. Along this road there are very many indications that what is is unbegotten and imperishable; for it is whole and immovable and complete. Nor was it at any time, nor will it be, since it is now, all at once, one and continuous.²⁰⁷

and

There is still left a single story
 Of a way, that it is. On this way there are signs
 exceedingly many—that being ungenerated it is also
 imperishable
 whole and of a single kind and unshaken and complete
 Nor was it ever nor will it be, since it is now, all together
 one, continuous.²⁰⁸

In these translations of the passage the neutral "it" is not bracketed, but like "what-is" seems to hold the place of an implied subject.²⁰⁹

Our variations on implied subjects denote the difficulty for modern (as well as perhaps some ancient) eyes and ears in rendering the goddess' speech intelligible. The variety of translations are, in turn, generally supported by a variety of interpretations that focus on the appropriate subject for *esti*. That is, whether a subject is implied, like "it," or syntactically appropriate, like "what-is," depends upon a translator's understanding of the message and intent of Parmenides' text within the parameters of her understanding of the grammar and syntax of ancient Greek. In this way, whether *esti* is subjectless or implies a subject converges upon our understandings of the functions of language.

Alternatively, however, other scholars and philosophers (Mourelatos, Calogero, Havelock, and Waugh)²¹⁰ maintain that the subject of the goddess' words is "is," i.e., the word *esti*. On this interpretation, the goddess' "is" is subjectless, and a subjectless "is" is actually consistent with the attributions of "is" listed in the entirety of B8. Although the goddess qualifies "is" as "One," "steadfast," "continuous," "indivisible," these qualifications are not convertible. The goddess tells us "is" One, "is" steadfast, but in B8 she does not claim, nor can she be plausibly interpreted to claim "One is." This language initially suggests that like the sentence "Is route," we have a mistaken instance of a noun following a verb. But unlike our English language sentence, the possibilities for "correcting" the goddess' speech seem to be precluded by the very mistake she makes: it is not simply a matter of turning the terms around to make them intelligible; rather the goddess seems to prevent us from doing so by repeating the subjectless *esti*, exclusive of cognates, twenty-four times in the sixty-one lines that comprise the "trustworthy speech" of B8. Inclusive of cognates, *einai*—of which *esti* is the third person present indicative—is heard forty-five times. Add to this that if we take the goddess at her word that at B8.50, "Here I stop my trustworthy speech and thought about truth," then *einai* and its cognates are actually repeated forty-five times in the fifty lines comprising the goddess' "trustworthy speech."

While Mourelatos is correct that the lack of a "definite subject" is "odd" and "no doubt significantly deliberate,"²¹¹ the reasons for Parmenides' omission are highly debatable.²¹² If, however, we keep in mind that the entire poem was originally performed or read aloud to

an audience, we might begin to consider the lack of a “definite subject” in aural as well as visual terms. That is, whether the poem is read silently or aloud, the verb “to be” is a visually and aurally insistent presence. Moreover, if we do not add or bracket an implied subject, the subjectless *esti* seems to rupture the syntax of the passage. By “rupturing syntax” I mean that regular semantic relations—relations governing the meanings of utterances—and “logical” or “structural” relations—in effect, the “rules” of language—are, at least, temporarily suspended. It might further be said that by not giving “is” a subject, Parmenides intentionally breaks the rhythm of the goddess’ speech. But why should Parmenides break the rhythm of the goddess’ speech? While the experience of silently reading allows us to pause, reflect, go back or forward in order to consider and reconsider the poem’s semantic ambiguities and syntactical displacements, the experience of hearing or performing the poem does not allow for such reflection. But what we gain *from hearing the poem* might complement, or even outweigh, what we gain by visual, textual analysis of the poem.

If we hear or read the poem aloud, we are immediately aware of: (1) a dissolution of rhythm (sound) which, in an oral tradition, goes hand in hand with (2) a disassociation of meaning (sense), both of which are circumscribed by (3) the constant—one might say “pounding”—repetition of *esti* and *einai*.²¹³ If we are to believe Havelock that, contrary to our modern translations of the epics, *esti* is rare in archaic Greek oral poetry, then it is reasonable to assume that Parmenides’ audience would not have often heard this term, and perhaps never as subjectless, or as a subject itself. The question must be asked then: “What is the possible intent and purpose of ‘bare *esti*?’”

Answering this question requires awareness to the differences between literate and modern and nonliterate and ancient uses of *einai*. For instance, we often insert a copulative *esti* into modern translations of ancient texts in order to conform an archaic text to our syntax. But Havelock’s analyses show that in the poetry of Homer and Hesiod the overwhelming use of *einai* is locative and existential, rather than copulative. If the Homeric poet wants to show a relationship between “x” and “y,” he does so by an “appositional equivalence.” By “appositional equivalence” Havelock means that “x” and

"y" are "stated alone and placed side by side."²¹⁴ For example, from the *Iliad*:

- (80) more powerful a lord what time he rages against an
inferior [*kreisson basileus*];
(116) if that better [*ei to ge ameionon*];
(177) ever to you contention dear and wars and battles
[*aiei . . . toi eris te phile . . .*]

Modern translators of these passages readily supply *esti*, changing "more powerful a lord" to "more powerful is a lord," and "if that better" to "if that is better," and "ever to you contention dear" to "ever to you contention is dear." Although we might assume that the copulative use of *einai* is understood, this assumption derives from our tacit understanding of the possible types of relationships that could obtain between an "x" and a "y." But our ideas about what is possible for "x" and "y" are informed by our means of stating the relationship between "x" and "y." Our means for stating the relationship between "x" and "y" presuppose a syntax that is propositional: we readily classify and identify "x's" with "y's," and conversely, and this is how we articulate the relationship between "x" and "y." The Homeric poet, however, employs a syntax that is, in Havelock's terms, primarily performative or associative: "x's" and "y's" are simply placed side by side so that the listener is encouraged to "jump from one term to the next." (244) Jumping from one term to the next might suggest that "x" and "y" are "like" or "near" one another, but one cannot maintain "x" is "y" without supplying the copulative use of *einai*.

Following Havelock, perhaps Parmenides' bare *esti* is meant to be performative or associative. In this way, listeners to Parmenides who hear "The one—that [it] is, and that [it] cannot not be" (B2.3) do not hear, as we do, *that* is is one or *that* is cannot not be. To the contrary, archaic listeners hear is *like* one and *near* cannot not be, although "one" and "cannot not be" are not rightly said as a property or predicate of *esti* since the syntax for stating properties and predicates is not evident. On the other hand, while Havelock's analyses

do suggest a nonrepresentational function of language to the extent that if Parmenides is not stating propositions then our ways of understanding Parmenides need to be nonpropositional, it is also true that Parmenides inserts *esti* into the subject place of a diction that even in our language seems incapable of supporting it. That is, neither existential, locative, nor copulative explanations of *esti* fully explain how and why Parmenides' bare *esti* ruptures *the sound* of the poem. For any archaic Greek poet the rupture of sound underdetermines the rupture of sense, and so questions about Parmenides' bare *esti* must include questions about how and why Parmenides subverts metrical expectations.

One way of determining the extent to which an archaic Greek poet veers or stays upon a standard metrical course is to assume that there are certain laws of hexameter composition. These laws, of course, need to be understood in terms of the "art" of hexameter verse. As we have seen, hexameters are composed of formula. Each formula is a combination of mono- or multi-syllabic terms chosen or avoided because of their meter. Different metrical combinations might be placed along the development of a full line. But, as Mourelatos reminds us, "the norms of hexameter poetry are the tendencies of the poet to conform in his composition to a certain pattern of frequencies."²¹⁵ By "frequencies" I take Mourelatos to mean the repetition of certain sound patterns within a line or from line to line. When analysts mention Parmenides' "parallel constructions" they are referring either to verbatim repetition of word-phrases in the same location of different lines, or to verbatim sound patterns, i.e., frequencies. Mourelatos adds that oral audiences would have developed certain expectations of rhythm and variation. While Parmenides "does have a good sense for the norms of hexameter composition" (266), Parmenides also deviates from some of these norms too often for such deviations to be incidental. Most notably, at the end of thirteen lines—the majority of which occur in B8—Parmenides deviates from the "magnificent cadence" of Homeric closure: according to Mourelatos, Parmenides' thirteen lines "totter."

While Mourelatos is correct that metrical variations cannot be considered separately from possible variations in sense or meaning, he

interprets some of Parmenides' metrical variations as the "violence" suffered by cycles of birth and death. *Esti* does not suffer such violence, and so a metrical variation that jars audience expectations is one means of pouring, as it were, old wine into new skins:

[W]hen images and traditional language are used as a "vehicle", the great likelihood is that they are used so [sic.] as models or analogues for ideas which do not as yet have current expression . . . Old words, old motifs, old images are appropriated and extended toward the expression of ideas and concepts which are still in the process of development and formation. (39)

That Parmenides is expressing a new way of thinking that the language and materials of oral poetry cannot quite support seems to presuppose that distinction between *muthos*—the tradition within which Parmenides' composes—and *logos*—the "what" of what Parmenides thought becomes. Based upon this distinction, we can place Parmenides somewhere between what *was* characteristic of archaic Greek experience and what *will be* characteristic of ancient Greek philosophy. Often, lost in translation, however, is the "what" of what is significant about Parmenides' poem. Alternatively, then, I suggest that possible reasons for the metrical variations and the subjectless *esti* in the poem continually refer back to what we do know of archaic Greek oral poetry and the communicative practices of Parmenides' culture. Rather than trying to determine a "definite" or "understood subject" for *esti*, or the proper name of the goddess, or even the proper name for "is," we might consider that the goddess does not provide a subject, a name, or even an image for "is" because "is" cannot be reduced to any subject, name, or image: to anything like "Path," "Route," "Light," "Night," or "House." Whether we silently read or hear the poem, we are immediately aware that this "is" is nameless, imageless, and subjectless; hence, one of the primary lessons of the poem could be that "is" is that which resists all names, and so it might be the ability to think against the impulse to name that proves to be the goal of Parmenides' "quest." But how is such a thinking through to be done? Prior to B8 in B4, the goddess says,

Look upon things which, though far off, are firmly present to the mind; For you shall not cut off what-is from holding fast to what-is, For it neither disperses itself in every way everywhere in order, Nor gathers itself together.

In this passage, the goddess seems to describe a sphere, but we are not to think of this sphere as anything dispersing or gathering itself, like a spiral expanding or contracting; rather, “what-is holds fast to what-is.” The sphere is, then, indissoluble, seemingly without beginning and end *like* the goddess’ speech in B5: “And it is all one to me where I am to begin for I shall return there again.”

While it is true that the exact location of B4 in Parmenides’ poem is still undetermined, most philosophers discuss this fragment in conjunction with the goddess’ “proof” for the indivisibility of “is” in B8.22–25.²¹⁶ Here the goddess says:

Nor is divisible, since all alike *is*;
 Nor is somewhat more here, which would keep it from
 holding together,
 Nor is somewhat less, but is all full of what-is.
 Therefore, is all continuous, for what-is is in contact with
 what-is.

The goddess’ account in B8 precludes the possibility of the divisibility and dissolubility of “is.” “Is” is affirmed as indivisible and continuous, like an unbroken line, and “is” is affirmed as “full” and of perfect proportion, like the sphere in B4. I suggest, then, that the account in B8 is directed (1) *against* conceiving “is” *solely* in linear or arithmetical terms, as in 8.22 “is” is not “divisible” but “all alike,” and, (2) *toward* conceiving “is” in geometric or spherical terms, as in 8.23–24 “is” is not somewhat more here . . . somewhat less, but is all full of “what is,” and then finally, (3) *of* conceiving “is” *in both linear and geometric terms*, as in 8.25 “is” is all continuous . . . what-is is in contact with “what-is.” In B8.22–25, then, the goddess gives an account of “is” which is *both* arithmetic and geometric, or linear and spherical. In these lines, the goddess combines otherwise disparate spatial concepts in her attribution of “is.”²¹⁷ Moreover, when B4 is considered in

conjunction with the lines in B8, we hear her further insistence that everything that is thought, whether perceptible or not, "is." Perhaps in B4 the goddess is expanding her statement of B3 that "the same thing is there for thinking and being." But then what might be the point of the description of an indissoluble sphere and the apparent connection between B4 and B8 within which spherical and linear concepts are conflated?

Some interpretations of Parmenides' thought focus on the goddess' association of *to eon* with a sphere,²¹⁸ or a "round ball," held in place by necessity. Recall that Justice must be coaxed with gentle words to allow the youth to pass through "the gates of the paths of Night and Day." Once through the gates the goddess' speech reverberates *einai* and *esti* until, at the end of B8, she concludes:

From every direction like the bulk of a well-rounded sphere,
 Everywhere from the centre equally matched; for must not be
 any larger
 Or any smaller here or there;
 For neither is there what-is-not, which could stop it from
 reaching
 Like; nor is there a way in which what-is could be
 More here and less there, since all inviolably *is*. (B8.42–8)²¹⁹

This passage suggests that whatever "is" is, we are surrounded by it, and always have been, and are, and always will be; hence, "is" is everywhere, and if "is" is everywhere, then there is no place which is-not. Since the same thing is there for thinking and for being, there is also no thought of is-not. There is always and only "is."

But if this interpretation is correct, then we are already at home in what-is and, along with the notion of a choice between paths or routes, the notion of a journey is also superfluous: there is no need for a journey or for a "quest" if the goal is to reach "is"; there is no need to go anywhere for "is" is all around. If this is the case, however, then the youth is neither in need of journeying to the goddess' "House," nor is the youth in need of hearing the goddess' speech; rather, this mortal youth abides in what-is, and so already thinks what-is, with or without the goddess' intercession.

The idea that we are already at home in what-is can help us reorient our understanding of the youth's "quest." Unlike Odysseus, who must overcome obstacles that block his "way" home, Parmenides' youth is gently reminded that such obstacles are only "apparent." Some of these obstacles might result from the "names" we ascribe to our perceptions, and from the stories we tell to ascribe meaning to our experiences. Thus one of the purposes of Parmenides' poem might be to *dissolve the literal epical references* by challenging the idea that a "quest" must correspond to a journey or to a narrative; i.e., a "story" within which there is a beginning and an end. For the goddess is not concerned where she begins because she will return there again. So too, the Muses are not concerned with the sequence of their songs; their speech abides in a constant cycle of *kudos-kleos*: praise begetting life begetting praise. If Parmenides understands, as I have suggested Xenophanes does, the purpose of oral composition and performance to be *our participation* in laudatory speech, then it might follow that Parmenides, too, is attempting to preserve or restore to this tradition its practice of reverence by freeing its language from the fixity of names and narrative structures.

Within the context of sung speech, the purpose of which is to make possible "true communication" with the divine, it makes a certain amount of sense that the goddess reminds the youth that even though the divine is always more than its presence makes known, the divine is *always* present. That the youth might need to hear how or why this is so can be supported by the little we do know about Parmenides as well as emergent forms of *poesis* during Parmenides' time. In terms of "what is said" about Parmenides, some philosophers refer to him as a "dissident Pythagorean."²²⁰ I take the phrase "dissident Pythagorean" to mean that either Parmenides was at one time affiliated with a Pythagorean brotherhood, or that he was sufficiently versed in Pythagorean teaching to proclaim his views in opposition.²²¹ In either case, a possible clue to Parmenides' "dissidence" might be found in the goddess' articulation of the apparent limit of "is."

According to the goddess, "is" is held in place by the principles of Fate, Justice and Necessity—*Moirai*, *Dike*, *Ananke*—who are responsible for the fettering, the shackling, the fencing in of what-is. But if "is" is something that is fenced, this indicates an area on the other side of

the fence, an area of "is-not." Those who read the goddess' speech as a reminder that we are, already, at home in "what-is" must grapple with the goddess' descriptions of the perimeter of "is" in B8 and the possibility that in marking that perimeter the goddess indirectly gestures toward an ontology of is-not. For in some parts of the "Way of Truth" the notion is one of a separate realm to which the goddesses who mark the limit of "is" are privy because they are on or create the boundary of "is."²²² The youth, however, is forbidden to think either of or beyond this boundary, and so he is told that what he cannot think cannot be.

And yet, what could constitute an ontology of "is-not"? As many scholars tell us, the concept "is-not" is not unfamiliar in archaic and ancient philosophy and is suggested by terms such as "void," "*apeiron*," and the Pythagorean Unlimited. Apparently, the Pythagoreans teach that, "The Heaven [the Limited] is one, and from the Unlimited it draws in upon itself time and breath or the Void, which keeps the places of individual things always distinct (201R)."²²³

The Limited draws time and Void or space from the Unlimited, and these are what keep the places of things in the world distinct. Since Parmenides' goddess seems to deny the distinctness of individual things²²⁴ how do we reconcile the image of the limit of "is" with the goddess' insistence that there is only "is"? We know the goddess' "House" lies beyond "the gates of the paths of Night and Day." The goddess' "House," then, is on the other side of the gates. If the "gates" bear resemblance to the "boundary" between Limited and Unlimited, then we might say that the goddess' "House" is on the other side of the Limited. And since it is here from her "House" that the goddess speaks, her speech conveys the sound of the Unlimited, which is "one"; hence, beyond "the gates of the paths of Day and Night" the places of individual things are not "distinct." *If things are not distinct, however, then there are no criteria for distinguishing between them, nor would there seem to be a way for correctly or incorrectly naming them.* In the goddess' "House" everything that is simply "is," all-together, indivisible, indistinguishable. And if everything "is," then the concept "is-not" has neither ontological significance nor explanatory power.

It cannot be the case, then, that we are already at home in what-is as long as "is" is understood to be "Limited" by "is-not." In order to

dissolve this opposition the goddess also exhorts the youth to “Look” at what seemingly cannot be seen. Consider that B4 contains one of the few modes of direct address given by the goddess to the youth.²²⁵ This fragment begins with the imperative “Look,” i.e., “Look upon things which, though far off, are firmly present to the mind.” Obviously, the goddess is commanding the youth to do something, i.e., to look at something, but what exactly are these things which, though far off, are firmly present to the mind? Cornford translates this command as “Look at things which though far off (to the senses?) are yet surely present to thought.”²²⁶ Cornford brackets and questions the phrase “from the senses,” but his inclusion of this phrase seems to be correct. Things which are far off from the senses are things which are not immediately perceptible. But if they are also present to thought, we can only conclude either (1) that these things were once perceptible but now are not, or (2) these things were never perceptible, but nevertheless can be thought. While (2) is precluded by the goddess’ claim in B3 that “the same thing is there for thinking and for being,” (1) might lead us to infer that the goddess is commanding the “youth” to “look” at what he cannot now perceive but remembers, and this might be a reference to the “legendary” character of “sung speech” which is memory itself—*muthos*. For the dynamics that drive the communicative practice of “sung speech” include three interrelated levels or manifestations of memory: divine memory—*Mnemosyne*—human memory—poet and audience—and the materials of memory—the language and rhythm of “sung speech.”

Interestingly, approximately a century prior to Parmenides’ poem, Sappho and her contemporaries begin to compose songs that hearken back and carefully articulate not only what “has been heard” but also what the poet, himself or herself, has experienced and is now remembering. Bruno Snell observes that these poet’s songs are more autobiographical in character and temperament than the epic poetry that precedes them. Snell further suggests that although the ability to compose songs and to sing of what one remembers displays the power of the mind to “overcome spatial separation and . . . the distances of time,” the “art of remembering” also creates a tension or conflict between making real what once was and yet will never be again. Often these songs juxtapose images that are bitter and sweet, light and dark;

they leave their listeners with a sense of longing and restlessness, the object of which is not easily named because it is that which “was” but now “is-not.”²²⁷

By commanding the “youth” to “look” at what he cannot see but can remember, the goddess might be reminding the “youth” that memory need not—or need not only—“overcome spatial separation and . . . the distances of time” because, according to the goddess, spatial separation and temporal distance do not exist. It is not the case that the youth cannot or should not remember, but that the youth needs to be made aware that there is a kind of memory, or thinking, that does not presuppose concepts of space and time that keep “the places of individual things always distinct.” “Sung speech” might be one manifestation of a type of memory that does not function on a Pythagorean account of time and space. Nor does sung speech recognize lyric restlessness and discontent. For as long as “sung speech” is—as Heidegger says—“genuine speech” it is capable of bringing what it says to “presence.” In the context of sung speech, there is no need to long or feel restless for what “was” for sung speech “was, is, and always will be,” i.e., constant: “For what coming-to-be of it will you seek? . . . And what need could have compelled it to grow? . . . Thus must either be completely or not at all” (B8.6, 9, 11). Since “not at all” cannot be thought without presupposing a false ontology of is-not, the youth’s thought must “be completely.”

Chapter 6

The Way It Seems . . .

Remaining to us of the “Way of Seeming” are forty or so lines from the following sources: Simplicius, Clement, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, Theophrastus, Galen, and Aurelinas.²²⁸ Estimates maintain, however, that the “Way of Seeming” originally comprised two-thirds of the entire poem. This suggests that the third part of the poem was originally more than two-hundred lines long.²²⁹ If this is the case, then Parmenides’ audience would have listened to what we call the “Way of Seeming” for a substantially longer period of time than they would have listened to the “Way of Truth” and the Proem. Of course, we cannot definitively ascertain what Parmenides’ audience heard during the “Way of Seeming” because so much of this part of the poem is missing. It is perhaps because of this that the “Way of Seeming” is minimally or under-analyzed in received scholarship: simply put, one cannot analyze what is not there.

One can, however, speculate upon the place of “Way of Seeming” in relation to fragments of other archaic *sophoi* and one can interpret the purpose of the “Way of Seeming” in relation to the better preserved parts of Parmenides’ poem, i.e., the Proem and the “Way of Truth.” Or, at least, *what one can do* with the “Way of Seeming” has been generally considered as such: we can understand the “Way of Seeming” in terms of what it is not, *aletheia*, and we can compare the “Way of Seeming” with other archaic accounts of astronomical or cosmological phenomenon. A possible obstacle to these approaches, however, concerns the fact that the vocabulary of the fragments of the “Way of Seeming” is still Homeric. Although the narrative of this “Way” is fractured, remnants of formulaic diction remain, some of which are breathtakingly beautiful—the wandering works of the round-eyed moon (B?)—and some of which just sound odd: <She placed> young

males on the right side <of the womb>, young females on the left (B17). Nevertheless, since Parmenides does not abandon the language and materials of sung speech in the “Way of Seeming” the third part of the poem must retain some of the elements of *muthos* and *logos* we attribute to the better preserved parts of the poem, and this includes the goddess’ insistence that following her “trustworthy” speech the youth will learn “mortal beliefs . . . Listening to the deceitful ordering of my words” (B8.51–2).

In relation to earlier passages of the poem, however, “mortal beliefs” do not seem to constitute an alternative route for thinking. In B2 the goddess identifies two routes, “is” and “is not.” But since the goddess restrains the youth from the route “is not”—“For never shall this prevail that things that are not are” (B7)—this route is actually not an option for the youth, nor for us: the only route available is “is.”²³⁰ Whatever the mortal beliefs of the “Way of Seeming” are, then, they cannot spring from an ontology of is-not for there is actually no such ontology available. Indeed, how could there be an ontology of is-not, for this would inform not only our naming of our perceptions but our perceptions themselves. Yet the goddess *does not criticize mortals for incorrectly perceiving*; rather *she criticizes mortals for incorrectly naming* what they do perceive. And so mortals “ply an aimless eye and ringing ear” and wander “deaf and blind alike” because of the two forms they have established “in their minds for naming” (B8.53). In relation to the two forms, “Of which it is not right to name one,” the goddess says we have gone astray: our names are incorrect. Our names are incorrect, however, not because we assume “is” originates from “is not”—for this is not allowed—but because we assume the authority of our names against the constant authority of “is.” We have “distinguished opposites in body” and “established signs” to keep the places of individual things distinct although, according to the goddess, “all is full of light and obscure night together” (B9). We have established a “distinctive name” for things light and dark even though light and night converge, “the narrower [rings] filled with unmingled fire, And those next upon them with night” (B12). And we have established a distinctive name for “male” and “female” even though male and female commingle, “Sending female to mingle with male, and again conversely, Male with female” (B12).

Interpretations vary, of course, concerning how we are to hear—and apply—the goddess’ criticism of names. On the one hand, since the goddess prefaces this speech as a “deceitful ordering of words,” everything the goddess says in the “Way of Seeming” is misleading, and so throughout the “Way of Seeming” perhaps the goddess is only playing the part of all those capricious deities who have come before her—those who throughout the epic tradition are capable of making what is false appear true, and what is true appear false, including the divine yet mischievous Circe of Homer’s *Odyssey*. On the other hand, the goddess tells the youth that her account is—in some way—superior to other accounts: “All this arrangement I proclaim to you as plausible” (B8.60). Even if the “Way of Seeming” is only “plausible,” it is still *better than* other accounts. According to the goddess, then, the “Way of Seeming” is neither “wholly unlearnable” nor completely without merit. And so, for all things that we have named we shall hear what is plausible: the nature of the aether and of all signs in the aether, the sun and the moon, and we “shall also know the surrounding sky, Whence it grew and how Necessity did guide and shackle it to hold the limits of the stars” (B10).

The subjects of the goddess’ speech—male/female, light/dark, sun/moon—seem to encourage us (1) to read the “Way of Seeming” as a cosmology that elucidates how things come to be, or (2) to read the “Way of Seeming” as a cosmogony that accounts for how we know natural phenomena.²³¹ That is, on the one hand, the “Way of Seeming” offers an account of *physis* that mortals believe, or the “Way of Seeming” describes how mortals come to have such beliefs. Either way, since the goddess prefaces her speech as a “deceitful ordering of words,” we often read the cosmological or cosmonological lessons of the “Way of Seeming” as inferior to the metaphysic or ontology of *esti* in the “Way of Truth.” In our scholarship, then, we tend to focus upon the disparity between the “Way of Seeming” and the “Way of Truth” in terms of the doxastic character of “Seeming” and the true character of *esti*. Hence, most scholarship, whether it explicitly states so or not, is devoted to a correct articulation of what “is” is in direct relation to what “is” is not, i.e., the “Way of Seeming.” In this way, just as we continue to associate the imagery of the insignificant proem with the imageless *esti*, we often interpret *aletheia* against the *doxa* of

the final fragments and conversely, even though the “Way of Seeming” has “proved of no lasting philosophical significance.”²³²

Alternatively, perhaps what is deceitful in the goddess’ ordering of her words is just that: the ordering. The language of the “Way of Seeming” returns to the conventional or unexceptional semantic and syntactical relations characteristic of the Proem. And so, from the perspective of the experience of hearing the entire poem, the namelessness of *to eon* is made more explicit by the goddess’ return to expected poetic rhythm in the final two-thirds of her speaking.

But, since we do not hear the entire poem, nor generally speculate about doing so, the goddess’ criticism of names in the “Way of Seeming” is often taken to mean that (1) implicit in the goddess’ speech in the “Way of Truth” is a method for determining the proper name for *to eon*; or (2) the deceitful character of the third part of the poem demonstrates the implausibility of any account of natural phenomena (according to Parmenides); or, (3) the criticism of names in conjunction with the doxastic beliefs of the “Way of Seeming” makes evident the veracity of one route for thinking and thereby the proper means for making statements over and against an incorrect route for thinking and the improper means for making only apparently true statements. I refer to these three different accounts as Platonist, representationalist, and propositionalist readings of Parmenides’ poem.²³³ Common to all save two derivative interpretations of the propositionalist approach is an explicit or implicit attempt to explain Parmenides’ thought in relation to what it is not: *doxa*.

First, some modern accounts of Parmenides’ poem take their cue from a certain formulation of Platonism. “Forms” endow “every entity with being,” but they are also imperceptible or suprasensible, and so not available for something like Heidegger’s *noein*. If we assume that Plato learns from Parmenides the “abstract” or “immaterial” character of “Forms,” then it follows that Parmenides’ “is” suggests to Plato an imperceptible being.²³⁴ But, even assuming that there is some connection between Platonic “Forms” and Parmenides’ “is,” and recognizing that there is evidence in Parmenides’ poem that there is nothing to “see” beyond “the gates of the paths of Night and Day,” it is still the case that “seeing” is not equivalent to perception. The goddess speaks and the youth hears, and this is what Parmenides’

audience would have been accustomed to in oral performance; hence, the idea that “is” is imperceptible, a logical “abstraction,” and in no way a part of “things” is at least questionable.

On the other hand, that “is” is, indeed, a part of things lends itself to what I call representationalist accounts of Parmenides’ poem. According to Heidegger and others, we moderns tend to assume that the objectivity of Being can be grasped in the same way objects are grasped—through representations. So the key for us to understanding Parmenides involves correctly identifying his particular representation of Being. For instance, Leon Woodbury claims that the object Parmenides is trying to think is the real world. If “there is one and only one right form of thought,” then there can be only one right form of thinking the real.²³⁵ The real is that-which-is. So, right “thinking must take the form it-is, because the real world is expressed in that-which-is” (153). Although our thinking must take the form it-is, the problem for mortal subjects is also a problem of the correct expression of “it-is.” The names that mortals ascribe to the real world are not, according to Woodbury, merely fanciful, but they are also *not* correct expressions of “it-is” because mortals “accept the authority of appearance” (*doxa*) and institute their names with reference to this (150). Could there be, then, “a name, not made by men” that refers to the real?

Using B7 as “direct confirmation,” Woodbury concludes that this name is “Being.”²³⁶ “Being” is no ordinary word, but the name of the real world because “not even thought can dispense with it” (157) unless, of course, thought strays from the right route for thinking. But then this is what the goddess teaches: how not to stray from the right route for thinking and speaking by continually thinking and speaking “Being.” The goddess’ revelation, then, is that world is expressed in the name “Being” (157).

The question Woodbury puts to Parmenides is: how can a mortal subject come to know the real world? The answer Woodbury finds is: by thinking and speaking “Being.” An objection Heidegger—and others—might raise is that Woodbury seems to presuppose a very real distinction between subjects (speakers) and objects (things-in-themselves or nonlinguistic entities). The bridge between subjects and objects might be built with linguistic representations (names),

but such a bridge also sags under the weight of appearances (*doxa*). Although mortal minds might be, voluntarily or otherwise, committed to belief in the real, mortal minds are also, according to Woodbury, unstable. So, there is a real discrepancy between what mortals can represent linguistically and that name “not made by men”: “But men’s convictions are not steadfast, because they have accepted the authority of appearance (*doxa*) and are held fast in the contradictions of the dualism to which this testifies” (150).

To be steadfast in our convictions is to continually think and speak “Being,” thereby avoiding the contradictions resulting from dualism, i.e., a commitment to a distinction between what is real and what is only apparent. Since “being” is never apparent, to continually think and speak “being” is to resist the distinction between what is real and what is only apparent and thereby avoid an “unstable mind.”

A difficulty with Woodbury’s analysis concerns his suggestion that the goddess imparts to the youth a method for determining a correct name for the world. While it is true that the goddess says that what is not cannot be, and also seems to suggest that mortals incorrectly name what is not as what is, it is also true that the goddess’ “Way of Truth” is entirely nameless. If there is a correct method for determining the name of the real, why would Parmenides’ goddess go to such great lengths to avoid names in her speech? Moreover, Woodbury seems to assume that the purpose of names is to represent objects, e.g. that a name is a sign that stands in for an “x” that is not linguistic. While language *as representation* is intelligible to us because we inhabit a post-classical, literate world, the notion that the name “Being” correctly represents the world might not obtain for those who are not familiar with—nor need be familiar with—a representational account and practice of language. In sung speech *semata* are x and *physis*, too, is *semata*. In the context of a communicative practice driven by *semata* attempts to attach names to x and y are, on one hand, superfluous, and on another, inappropriate. *Semata* are in no more need of a name than a rainbow. To the contrary, one of the purposes of Parmenides’ poem might be to make us aware of our uniquely human impulse to name: to sequester, categorize—indeed conquer—the “inaccessible” or the “other” to our own minds and needs. If one objects that rationality depends upon the practice of naming, the practice of

keeping “the places of individual things always distinct,” the goddess can counter that indeed this is true of mortal beliefs. But mortal beliefs would not be possible without the constant authority of *esti*. It is not names, then, that make rationality possible. Rather, names are the result of our desire or need to reunite as “One” a world that we have divided into worlds by our categories that “keep[s] the individual places of things always distinct.” Hence, the purpose of Parmenides’ poem cannot be to lead us to a correct name or representation for the world.

Another aspect of Platonist and representationalist readings concerns our frames of reference for, or our dispositions toward, what is standard to, or reasonably expected from, an ancient text. That is, since for us speaking and thinking truthfully is always measured against the *x* and the *y* that speaking and thinking are about, it follows that speaking and thinking truthfully about ancient Greek thinking requires an openness to “the ways of hearing and frames of reference of early thinking.”²³⁷ Obstacles can arise, however, given the frames we choose and the dispositions we adopt. For instance, G. E. L. Owen reads Parmenides’ “invention” of the “timeless present” in association with passages in Plato and Aristotle, in particular a passage from Plato’s *Timaeus* (37e–38a):²³⁸

Day, nights, months, years . . . are all parts of time, and “was” and “will be” have come about as forms of time. We are wrong to apply them unthinkingly to what is eternal. Of this we say that it was and is and will be, but strictly only “is” belongs to it. “Was” and “will be” should be spoken of the process that goes on in time, for they are changes.²³⁹

According to Owen, from Parmenides Plato learns the difference between statements that are grammatically tensed and statements that are logically tenseless. Statements of the first form apply to things that change; statements of the second form apply to what does not change, i.e., to what is eternal, ungenerated, imperishable, immovable, or, in Plato’s terminology, to what is a “Form” (330).²⁴⁰

But while Owen concludes that Plato’s mistake, like Parmenides’, is to assume that logical tenselessness can apply to things as well as

statements, it is not evident from Parmenides' poem that logical tenselessness, in the way Owen describes it, applies even here. Owen credits Parmenides with detensing the verb *esti*—the present indicative of *einai*—to be (319). Detensing *esti* means, in effect, to disassociate "is" from its "family connexions" with was and will be. But in order to detense *esti*, Parmenides must first have assumed that *esti* is tensed. Was this Parmenides' assumption?

Owen paraphrases one of the goddess' arguments: Let x be whatever "is" or exists. Since x does not "begin or cease and nothing happens to it," nothing can be said of x in the past or future tense. According to Owen, this argument fails to state the implicit assumption that "lapse of time is impossible without change" (319). Aristotle does make this assumption explicit more than a century later,²⁴¹ but do we have any evidence that this premise is implicit but unstated in Parmenides' poem? Perhaps Parmenides did not state the missing premise because the "timeless," constant authority of divine *legein* was not an issue for him.

Then again, and to support his reading of a detensed *esti*, Owen argues against Hermann Frankel's suggestion to emend the phrase "Nor was it ever nor will it be" (B8.5) to "Nor was it ever nor will it be at one time but not another."²⁴² Owen remarks that *in context* "at one time but not another" is equivalent to saying "at some time in the past or future but not now." But, Owen continues, the Greek phrase *ou* (or *oude*) *pote*—which he translates "nor (not) ever"—would *not ordinarily* have the sense of contrasting particular times. Frankel maintains, however, that it would be "logical suicide" for Parmenides to deny the possibility of contrasting temporal moments in an argument that concludes that his subject *remains the same through time*: that "it still is what it was and will continue to be what it is" (321).²⁴³ To the contrary, Owen points out that just as Parmenides uses "the language of motion in describing his immovable subject," so too he uses the language of "non-existence"—"there is no such thing as what is not"—to argue that "non-existence is nonsense" (321). In this way, Owen claims that the inconsistency between language and concept that Frankel attempts to mask in translation is only "superficial." According to Owen, Parmenides is creating a ladder that, like Wittgenstein's, must eventually be cast away. If one of the ladder's

rungs—"Nor was it ever nor will it be"—actually *means* "Nor was it ever nor will it be *at any time*," as Owen thinks it does, then Parmenides reasoning here, as elsewhere, is to engage a vocabulary of time in order to contrast the true timelessness of *esti*.

Although Owen's criticisms may accord with the grammar of the statement, the philosophical reasons he cites against Frankel might not stand. *In context*, Frankel's interpretation rings truer to the formula "what was, is, and ever will be"²⁴⁴ as this expression captures the "timeless" authority of divine speech as well as the divine force or power of *kudos*. For an oral poet and his audience, the issue is not so much whether or how *kudos* is bestowed—where it comes from or where it begins—but how *kudos* might be preserved. As Owen observes, Frankel's emendation can be reformulated as "Nor is it the case that *x* existed at some time (but not now) or will exist at some time (but not now)." To Owen this claim means that Parmenides *is arguing only* for the temporal continuity of his subject. If this is the case, then Parmenides' "denial [of past and future tenses] comes merely to the claim that *x* not only existed at some past time but *also* exists now, and not only will exist at some future time but *also* exists now" (320).

I take Owen to mean that such an argument is, or would be, trivial. Still, I think it is important to note a difference in Frankel's and Owen's interpretations. While Frankel's ("Nor was it nor will it be at one time but not another") evokes the idea of something always,²⁴⁵ continuing, everlasting—tenseless—Owen's ("Nor is it the case that *x* existed at some time (but not now) or will exist at some time (but not now)") is a statement that actually juxtaposes three apparently equal temporal tenses. We can further translate Owen's claim to "Now or (not-Was and not-Will be)", or, "If it was, then it is now, and, if it will be, then it is now." Given the disjunctive statement, while only one disjunct need be true, if both are false, the entire statement is false. And yet, proving either disjunct true requires assuming that there is indeed a "theory of time" at work in Parmenides' poem in which all three tenses of time are considered equal until the present tense is detensed. Given the conditional statement, both show that the past and future tenses are sufficient but not necessary conditions for the present tense. While this is exactly what Owen sets out to prove *is not* the case, in order to demonstrate this he must show what is unique to

the present tense. But to claim that the present, unlike the past and future, is detensed begs the question that he sets out to answer.

Both Owen and Frankel offer interpretations that attempt to solve the riddle of timelessness in B8. It is not implausible to do so, but it might also prove fruitful to ask whether Parmenides too would have beheld the constant authority of “what-is” as a riddle? The notion that the Muses sing “that which has been, that which is, and that which will be” is already evident in the language and materials of “sung speech”; the “timeless” authority of “sung speech” is not a problem for archaic audiences. Moreover, if we remain sensitive to the very real possibility that Parmenides performed his poem, we can say that what he seems to do is intentionally break the rhythm of what his audience hears by not providing *einai* with what we might call a conventional “subject.” For if we ask Parmenides “what is?” he tells us “is.” But does it follow that Parmenides is detensing a verb so that it cannot be used in statements that apply to things? This claim ignores the context of the communicative practice Parmenides operates within, and this context suggests an experience of, and disposition to, language that does not—to the extent we do—disassociate words from things.

Our ability and preference for distinguishing between the senses and tenses of verbs not only does not reflect the practice of oral performance, it might be a direct result of the type of conceptual analysis that reading and writing make possible. To this extent, I submit that the type of “dialogue” we often have with Parmenides is more than just theory laden, as Heidegger suggests. Rather, our dialogue is deeply influenced by the types of analysis reading and writing afford us: propositional analysis.

Alexander Mourelatos compiles what he calls the “standard [contemporary] interpretation” of Parmenides’ poem.²⁴⁶ This interpretation yields four interrelated claims:

- (i) in section B2, Parmenides suppresses the subject of *esti* so that the true subject of the correct route for thinking will become clear as the argument unfolds;
- (ii) the route *ouk esti* (is-not) is “banned” because anything said along this route fails “to refer (semantically speaking) to actual entities”;

- (iii) Parmenides is not confusing a propositional function with an existential function; rather
- (iv) *esti* and *einai* are used “veridically” and so “have the force of ‘is actual’ or ‘obtains’ or ‘is the case’.”

The pioneers of the standard interpretation are G. E. L. Owen, Montgomery Furth, and Charles Kahn.²⁴⁷ Mourelatos also gives credit to John Raven and Guido Calagero for introducing many of the ideas that eventually evolve into the standard interpretation. Nevertheless, to this standard interpretation Mourelatos raises the following objections: (1) the text prior to B2 (B1 or the “proem”) and following B8.3 is not considered relevant for analysis,²⁴⁸ and (2) this includes epical allusions (which Havelock argues are important for understanding Parmenides’ philosophical intent), and the entire “Way of Seeming” (which Mourelatos argues is important for understanding Parmenides’ philosophical intent). Finally (3) premise (iv) of the standard interpretation does not, after all, correspond to Parmenides’ text.

We have already seen Owen’s use of the veridical “It is the case.” If we ask why such a phrase rings true to Parmenides’ text, Kahn might answer that there is another “absolute use of the verb *esti* in Greek” (besides the existential and, according to the standard interpretation, copulative uses), and this is the veridical use.²⁴⁹ Assuming the veridical use, *esti* means “it is the case” where “it” refers to “the subject (or object) which we know.” While we might express this formally as “*m* knows that *p*” entails “*p*,” Kahn suggests Parmenides might express this materially: “It (whatever we can know, or whatever there is to be known) is a definite fact, an actual state of affairs” (711–12). Either way, Kahn is claiming (1) that *esti* must have a “subject”—albeit a logical subject—“it,” and (2) “it” is “*the knowable*, the object of cognition,” and (3) thereby “is” asserts not only the existence “but the determinate being-so of the knowable object, as the ontological ‘content’ or correlate of a true statement” (712–13).

The success of the standard interpretation can be seen in the variety of translations that emend the logical subject “it” to the goddess’ “bare *esti*.” But if the argument for the veridical use of *einai*, which is in no way exhausted here, depends upon a logical subject—an object

of knowledge *per se*—and yet Parmenides does not offer us such a subject, what justifies its inclusion?

Patricia Curd offers an analysis of a “predicative” *esti* that she says “shares deep affinities with Mourelatos’ account of what he calls a speculative “is.””²⁵⁰ For both philosophers, *esti* yields the genuine or real character of something: “it is what we know when we know just what something genuinely is, or what it is to be that thing” (39). Similar, I suggest, to Aristotle’s correct categorical assertions that access the traits of being, Curd’s predicative understanding of *esti* precludes the need to debate between the copulative and existential uses of *esti*. That is, to know that x exists does not entail knowing its nature, but to know the genuine character of x does entail knowing that x exists. *Esti* does not, then, simply assert existence, nor is its propositional function reducible to that which connects—ontologically and otherwise—subjects to predicates. While it can be said that predicates abound in B8—imperishable, ungenerated, indissoluble—conventional subjects are absent. So, I take Curd and Mourelatos to mean that *esti* acts as a type of synthesis. In Heidegger’s terms, “synthesis” is “to let something be seen in its togetherness with something.” Crucial to this idea is the focus on *something* or the *what* of what is known rather than its linguistic representation. Moreover, a predicative or speculative *esti* allows for complete recognition and information of something such that no further questions need arise; *esti* “uniquely identifies its subject.”²⁵¹

Both the predicative and speculative understanding of *esti* trouble the standard interpretation to the extent that both Curd and Mourelatos (1) consider and explain how a speculative or predicative *esti* stands in relation to the *entire* poem; (2) are sensitive to the Homeric tradition and thereby Parmenides’ epical language; and (3) challenge the apparent need for an unstated yet implied subject for *esti*. That is, both Curd and Mourelatos seem to take the goddess’ speech for what it says rather than imposing upon an ancient text what it should or could say if Parmenides were privy to structural linguistics, sentential calculus, i.e., our representationalism.

Nevertheless, propositional analyses can sidestep the non- or preliterate environment of Parmenides’ composition and performance. The fact remains that until such time as we can prove that Parmenides composed his poem for a literate and not an oral

reception, we must try to “inquire properly into the ways of hearing” and speaking that guide early Greek thinking.²⁵² To this extent, it is well-known in the communicative practice of sung speech that the Muses are free to speak the truth or not: “we know how to tell many falsehoods that seem like truths but we also know, when we so desire, how to utter the absolute truth.”²⁵³ While for us this freedom might forewarn the difficulty mortals did, do, and will have in sorting between what is true and what false of what the Muses say, from another perspective such freedom entails the *impossibility* of forgetting what is said. Clearly anyone who hears Parmenides’ poem cannot forget *esti*. In the context of sung speech, however, this is exactly as it should be. For not only is it not possible to forget the goddess’ *esti*, it is also not possible to conceive—to think—of forgetting the goddess’ *esti* lest one succumb to oblivion, death, *lethe*. To the contrary, like the briefest of formulas that, as Plato says, are in no danger of being forgotten, *esti* is most completely *aletheia*.

For, in the poem, Parmenides uses the term *aletheia* to introduce the goddess’ “story” of the routes of inquiry; hence, prior to *muthos* there is “truth.” Differing slightly from Heidegger’s “unconcealment,” we can also translate *aletheia* as what is “not”—*a*—“forgotten”—*lethe*.²⁵⁴ That is, what we hear and understand as “truth,” the archaic Greeks might hear and experience as what is “not forgotten.” Yet what is “not forgotten” might not—or not only—be that which needs to be remembered. *Aletheia* might also be that which *cannot be forgotten* or *need not be committed to memory*. And so, we might not need to be trained as an oral poet is trained to remember and speak the “truth” because “truth” in Parmenides’ poem precedes the goddess’ speech, and so hers is a speech in or “of truth”: it cannot be forgotten, or to borrow Heidegger’s term, “concealed.”²⁵⁵

Once again, this might sound strange to us. For us, at least, “truth” is a property of statements or consists in the judgments we make about the relationships of predicates to subjects, or words to things. In this way, most of our ways of speaking and thinking about truth treat “truth” as derivative, e.g. as a quality or property to be determined *after the fact* of speaking and thinking. Consequently, truth derives from what we say and what we think, but truth is not prior to what we speak and think.

Perhaps for Parmenides, however, *aletheia* is prior to genuine speaking and thinking: in his poem, *aletheia* is prior to divine speech. On this much, at least, Parmenides is clear, but perhaps it is only this much that we need or can hear. For in order to come to a just or reverent understanding of *esti*, there must be something that guides our thinking and speaking else *noos* could mistakenly conceive *is-not* as *is*. The yield of such speaking and thinking would not only be *doxa*; it would also not constitute praise, which is meant to soar into the air, “raised among the good and the just toward the shimmering ether.”²⁵⁶

In order to preserve the practice of “laudatory speech,” Parmenides attempts to reorient or direct *noos* not upon “truth,” as if “truth” were the culmination of a “quest,” but rather in or *of truth* as if “truth” were our guide. One of the purposes of Parmenides’ poem, then, might be to revere the beginning or origin for speaking and thinking rather than lead us to its just or “correct” conclusion. For what conclusion can one reach concerning a nameless *esti*? That “it disappears with the breath that carries it”? Or that it carries the breath that cannot disappear?

Notes

¹ Evidence for this consists in what was written about Parmenides, both in terms of a developing art of *historie* as well as by his philosophical predecessors, notably Plato and Aristotle.

² Ancient writers use the term “floruit” to indicate what we might call the prime of a man’s life, around forty years of age. The relationship of teacher to student is also characterized around the date of the teacher’s floruit. That is, Apollodorus tells us that Xenophanes flourished at the foundation of Elea in 540. If Parmenides was a student of Xenophanes, Parmenides’ birth is determined by the time Xenophanes flourished. And as Xenophanes is to Parmenides, so Parmenides is to Zeno, for Zeno is said to have been born at the time Parmenides flourished, roughly 500. The problem with this chronology is that there is no conclusive evidence that Parmenides was a student of Xenophanes. Moreover, the two primary sources for the date of Parmenides’ birth are Plato’s dialogue of the same name, at 127a, and Diogenes Laertius, IX, and their respective dates significantly conflict. Since Diogenes’ dates are most likely derived from Apollodorus, Kirk, Raven, and Schofield suggest that Plato’s dates are probably the most reliable. This would mean that Parmenides was born around 515 and would have been sixty-five years of age when the dialogue between Parmenides, Zeno, and a young Socrates occurs, around 450 (*The Pre-Socratic Philosophers* [Cambridge University Press, 1983] 240–41). Needless to say, although there is no reason to assume that Plato’s *Parmenides* is historically accurate, Plato and Diogenes do agree that Parmenides of Elea was born sometime during the latter half of the sixth century, and so most likely lived at least through the earlier half of the fifth century. Hence, it is only in the most general sense that we can refer to the dates of Parmenides’ birth and “floruit.”

³ *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 239–40.

⁴ J. L. Austin calls these “performative” elements or aspects that comprise some of the descriptive criteria of speech acts analyzed in, for instance, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962). While I diverge from Austin’s analysis in a later chapter, I do agree that tone of voice, cadence, emphasis, and the accompaniments and circumstances of utterance are elements of speech acts. With regard to tone of voice, cadence, and emphasis, he writes: “These features of spoken language are not reproducible readily in written language” (74).

⁵ For example, “Scholar Says E-Mail Helps Erode Distinctions between Speech and Writing,” an interview with Professor Naomi S. Baron conducted by Jessica Ludwig, and circulated by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Thursday, September 28, 2000. In this interview, Professor Baron suggests that speech—which is primarily

less formal and more “sloppy” than writing—provides the communicative model for much e-mail correspondence, and this creates a hybrid “style” of speech-writing that could have far reaching effects on formal writing in higher education. While Professor Baron’s point is well taken, my concern is the (possible) implicit assumption that speech is somehow inferior to writing, or that writing is somehow—in general—a superior mode of communication and so all other modes of communication are evaluated and performed in terms of written standards.

⁶ Cf.: Havelock’s discussion of Linear B, its dating, and impact on ancient Greece in *Preface to Plato* (Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 115ff.

⁷ Some of the seminal discussions of the transition from orality to literacy include Eric Havelock’s *Preface to Plato*, W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Harvard University Press, 1989), and Kevin Robb, *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁸ Jackson P. Hershbell, for one, suggests that Plato’s dialogues, as well as Plutarch’s and others’, have their origin in “what remained an oral-aural culture until book printing in fifteenth century” (“Reflections on the Orality and Literacy of Plato’s Dialogues” in *The Third Way*, ed. Francisco J. Gonzalez [Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995] 31). See, as well, Brian Stock’s account of Ambrose’s “silent reading” and the role this plays in Augustine’s *Confessions* (*Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowing, and the Ethics of Interpretation* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996]).

⁹ As Hershbell reminds us, see Plato’s *Phaedrus* at 257e, 275aff., and 277eff., as well as the *Seventh Letter*, 341cff. Elinor J. M. West discusses the suspicions classical Athenians maintain for written evidence in litigation: “When a written contract was presented in court, it was not enough simply to submit the document itself as evidence. What was required in addition was the word of witnesses who could testify to what had first been decided by word of mouth” (“Plato’s Audiences” in *The Third Way*, ed. Francisco J. Gonzalez [Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995] 49). See also Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 148–49. It is interesting to note that even within our extremely literate practices, we still use expressions such as “You have my word” and “I gave my word.” Although, for us, in situations of legal testimony and determinations of contractual responsibility and obligation, written testimony and signed contracts are often used as evidence *against* the authenticity or sincerity of a spoken word. Hence, our literate practices—at times—stand in direct contrast to ancient Greek oral-literate practices.

¹⁰ Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, 115ff. (hereafter references will be included in parenthesis in the text).

¹¹ The passage Havelock, following Jaeger, alludes to is from *Frogs*, 52ff., in which the god Dionysus is “sitting in the ship which he *claims* to have commanded at Arginusae, reading a separate edition of Euripides’ *Andromeda*” (Jaeger, *Paideia*, vol. I, p. 337, emphasis mine). Havelock’s reference appears in *Preface to Plato*, 127.

¹² I attribute this insight to Joanne Waugh, who writes, “If one is persuaded by Havelock that differences in the ways in which vocabularies are used for preserving and transmitting culturally significant information effect the content

of what is communicated, then historical and ethnographical accounts of other cultures must take into account whether the vocabulary of this culture was part of an oral and traditional 'technology' for cultural communication, or a literate one—or part of a transitional phrase from one to the other" ("Heraclitus: The Postmodern Presocratic?" *Monist*, 1991, 608).

- ¹³ What the ancients mean, singularly or generally, by "philosophy" is open to a variety of questions. Parmenides, to our knowledge, does not use the term, and in fact, according to Andrea Nightingale, the term "philosophy" is first used or coined in a debate between Isocrates and Plato over the apparent virtues of different types of *paideia* (*Genres of Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995]). Be that as it may, what the ancients mean by "philosophy" might differ significantly from what we mean by "philosophy," and even still, an archaic use—or appropriation—of language for "philosophical" purposes might differ from, say, Plato's, Aristotle's, and the atomists' understanding of *philosophia*, in whole or in part. Here I stress *sophia* and "wisdom" upon the advice of John Anton.

- ¹⁴ Cf.: "It is as the Western concept of language . . . were revealed today as the guise of or disguise of primary writing: more fundamental than that which, before this conversion, passed for the simple 'supplement to the spoken word.'" In "The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing" in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 7ff. In comment, Joanne Waugh writes: "If, as Derrida has suggested, the philosophical tradition that is *written* by Plato and Aristotle typically *appears to 'privilege' speech over writing* then this tradition will disguise not only its written origins, but also the way(s) in which writing affects speech" ("Heraclitus: The Postmodern Presocratic?"). Of course, those who continue to claim the accuracy of Derrida's insight maintain that writing is logically prior to speech. It is this claim that I attempt to show is unwarranted.

- ¹⁵ See Joanne Waugh, "Practically Ontology: A Writerly Reading of Margolis" in *Interpretation, Relativism, and the Metaphysics of Culture*, ed. M. Krausz and R. Shusterman (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1999) and "Neither Published Nor Perished" in *The Third Way*, ed. Francisco J. Gonzalez (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995) 73ff. with reference to Donald Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. Ernest LePore (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1986).

- ¹⁶ *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books 1996) 88 (hereafter all references occur by page number in parenthesis within the text).

- ¹⁷ By "representationalist" I mean an account of language that assumes or maintains "that there is an ontological and epistemological gulf between the subjective and the objective" where thought and talk and intelligibility fall on the subjective side, and dumb, brute matter on the objective side. Only by presupposing such a gulf can something like a "spectator" theory of knowledge obtain. Yet, it is, at least, questionable whether such an account of language *and* knowledge obtain for archaic Greece. It is even questionable whether there is an archaic Greek term that comes close to our use and

understanding of the verb “represent” (“Fleshing Out the Form of Beauty: Socrates, Dialogue, and the Forms,” Joanne Waugh and Lisa Wilkinson, *Plato’s Forms: Varieties of Interpretation*, ed. William Welton (Lexington Books, 2002). Other philosophers who use “representational” in this way include Richard Rorty, *Objectivism, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Papers*, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1994), and John McDowell, “Knowledge and the Internal,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. LV, no. 4 (December 1995) 877–93.

- ¹⁸ In other words, I agree with Nagy that we try to retain the spirit and regard the ancients had for *zetema*—the question—in our research and understanding. As Nagy explains, *zetema* is certainly meant to be answered, but with the goal of encouraging further questions, and contributing to an ongoing scholarly debate. Definitive answers are neither encouraged, nor expected, for any such “right” answer would negate contrary answers, as well as the inferences and arguments that support them, and this would—in effect—negate the original intent of what it means to engage in *zetema*. The goal of *zetema* is not victory but insight gathered and shared between and among a variety of academic disciplines. In this respect, Nagy guides his *Homeric Questions* in accordance with “the ancient ideal of *doctrina* [as] a *multiple variaeque*, a course of studies that is many-sided and composed of many different elements” (6). So, too, here, I attempt to retain this spirit with respect to the “venerable and terrible” Parmenides, and to draw from many different interpretative approaches.
- ¹⁹ I owe to Ava Chitwood the insight that when we name or label all *sophoi* prior to Plato as “Presocratic” we create a concept of philosophy that takes Plato’s “Socrates” as the standard, and this can lead to a monolithic or monolinguistic notion of what philosophy was, is, and can be.
- ²⁰ Although Alexander Mourelatos suggests, along with Eric Havelock, that Parmenides is “coining” certain terms in his poem, the recent analysis of A. H. Coxon maintains: “The 150 lines of Parmenides contain an average of only one non-Homeric word in every three verses; of these 55 words all but five . . . are directly related to or compounded from words used by Homer. There is no sign of the introduction of unfamiliar words which marks the style of Empedocles, and it is improbable that Parmenides introduced local dialect forms of regular epic words. His innovations in word-forms common serve metrical ends . . . ; otherwise he departs from his Homeric and Hesiodic patterns only where his subject pushes him in the direction of *prose diction*” (*The Fragments of Parmenides* [Assen—The Netherlands: Van Gorcum and Comp., 1986] 7, emphasis mine). Alternatively, Mourelatos suggests that the term *dizeis*, used in conjunction with *odoi*, is indicative of a quest (*The Route of Parmenides* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970] 67). Havelock also suggests that *odos* and its correlatives are repeated throughout the fragments and notably paired with *dizeis* (“Parmenides and Odysseus” in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. LXIII). None of these terms, however, appear in the list of “innovations” or “compounds” that Coxon has collected.
- ²¹ Jean-Pierre Vernant writes, “It is well known that written composition is governed by more varied and adaptable rules than oral composition of the formular [*sic*]

type. The writing of prose marks a clear departure. As Adam Parry saw clearly, there is a strict correlation between the development of abstract language and the stylistic mastery achieved by the first great Greek writers of prose. Prose composition—medical treatises, historical accounts, the speeches of orators and the *dissertations of philosophers*—represent not only a different mode of expression from that of oral tradition and poetic composition but also a new form of thought” (*Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd [New York: Zone Books, 1980] 186–87, emphasis mine). As well, Segal suggests: “The oral tradition easily tolerates multiple versions of tales; the definitiveness of writing develops a more exclusive notion of truth as unitary, difficult, and attainable only through a process of inquiry and examination” (“Spectator and Listener” 194).

²² *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, 189. Pace Vernant, G. S. Kirk maintains that the iterative function of myth is “to confirm, maintain the memory of, and provide authority for tribal customs and institutions—the whole clan system, for example, or the institution of kingship and the rules for succession” (*Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970] 256).

²³ See Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993) 193ff. including reference to Plato’s *Theaetetus*, 143c. Svenbro notes that it is here that the slave is to begin reading the “transcript of Socrates” conversation with Theaetetus and Theodorus, and does not cease reading until 210d, the end of the dialogue. See also Rosalind Thomas (*Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece*) who discusses the sheer size and weight of the papyrus rolls that contained *scripta continua*, and Deborah Tarn Steiner (*The Tyrant’s Writ: Myths and Images of Writing in Ancient Greece* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994]) for examples of hostility to writing.

²⁴ Letter VII in *Plato Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. Glenn R. Morrow, 344c–d.

²⁵ Concerning the authenticity of Letter VII Cooper writes: “. . . the least unlikely to have come from Plato’s pen, [it] contains much tantalizing information about Plato’s views about philosophy which if genuine could be of some significance for working out his final positions” (1635). These “final positions,” however, are highly debatable. Currently, only certain types of Plato scholarship tend to interpret Plato’s dialogues as providing answers to questions such as “what is justice,” piety, beauty. Other Plato scholars, however, question whether this is an accurate reception of the dialogues, for it assumes that Plato’s philosophy can be encapsulated in a series of propositions that, either in whole or in part, provide answers to Socrates’ infamous question(s) (See *The Third Way: New Directions in Platonic Studies* and *Who Speaks for Plato* [Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995, 2000]). I think it is relevant to mention these varying approaches to Plato here because they illustrate the difference between reading the dialogues as dramatic accounts of “philosophical conversations” and reading the dialogues as having the same ends as nonliterary, philosophical treatises. In my own opinion, given the rich history of epical speech and drama in ancient Greek culture, it is difficult to see how one can dismiss this tradition in relation to Plato’s dialogues.

- ²⁶ Perhaps more appropriately, in the absence of knowledge of any type, including belief, it is nonsensical for us to speak of "truth."
- ²⁷ Eric Havelock describes the literate revolution as a "thunder-clap in human history" that we, so predisposed to literate practices and technologies, might hear as nothing more or less than "the rustle of papers on a desk" ("The Alphabetization of Homer," 4). By comparing the literate revolution to the "Copernican Revolution" I mean to suggest that the development of writing ushers in an entirely new way of communicating and thinking, and, indeed an entirely new way of thinking about thinking, about being, and about communicating. For example, while there are many different types of metaphysics current today, ranging from the astrologer's claim that at birth certain planetary conjunctions are "inscribed" on a human soul to the more "orthodox" proposition that "In the beginning was the Word" and the "Word was made flesh," as I hope to illustrate neither of these metaphysical claims or ideas is possible without some concept or disposition to writing, or imprinting, or inscription. Hence, prior to the development of writing, metaphysics—if we can speak of this—must have looked and sounded quite differently. And so the "literate revolution" is truly a revolution of extreme theoretical and practical significance.
- ²⁸ Waugh, "Neither Published Nor Perished," 69.
- ²⁹ Charles Segal, "Spectator and Listener" in *The Greeks*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant, trans. Charles Lambert, p. 194.
- ³⁰ G. S. Kirk writes that the earliest alphabetic inscriptions are to be found in Greece dating from 750. Although "a verse or two of poetry could be scratched or painted on a perfume-pot or drinking cup . . . the first distinguishable figure of the era of literacy is Archilochus . . . who observed an eclipse of the sun in 648 and *certainly* composed his poems in writing" (emphasis mine). Solon, too, apparently used written techniques to organize and preserve his political programs (See "Homer" in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and B. M. W. Knox [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985] 45ff.). For further discussion of the introduction of the ancient Greek alphabet, see Kevin Robb, "Poetic Sources of the Greek Alphabet: Rhythm and Abecedarium from Phoenician to Greek," *Communication Arts in the Ancient World*, ed. Jackson P. Hershbell and Eric Havelock (New York: Hastings House Publishing, Inc., 1978).
- ³¹ The dates for the "composition" of the epics as well as their transcriptions is speculative, generally somewhere between the twelfth century—the earliest date offered—and the seventh century—the latest dates offered—for composition, and sometime after the ninth or eighth century for transcription, possibly even as late as the fifth century for the complete text. See Kirk, "Homer" 45ff. as well as Hermann Frankel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, trans. Moses Hadas and James Willis (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1973) 6ff., and Eric A. Havelock, "The Alphabetization of Homer" in *Communication Arts in the Ancient World*.
- ³² See Jesper Svenbro, *Phrasikleia*, 45ff.
- ³³ See Kevin Robb, "The Poetic Sources of the Greek Alphabet: Rhythm and Abecedarium from Phoenician to Greek."

³⁴ Cf.: Hermann Frankel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, p. 7ff.

³⁵ *Masters of Truth*, 42.

³⁶ It should be mentioned here that many scholars note Homer's peculiar position within the oral tradition. For Homer appears "at the exact epoch in which writing . . . in the ninth or early eighth century, began to spread through Greece" (Kirk, "Homer," 45). If Kirk is correct, then it is possible that we can begin to see the origin of a "literate revolution" with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Kirk's dating here, however, can be also considered conservative. Havelock, for one, suggests that the earliest inscriptions of the epics date from 700, and yet the "complete textual existence" of the epics was probably not achieved until the fifth century. Havelock cites documentation that "the Homeric poems were put in order after some fashion in Athens during the reign of Peistratus or his sons" ("The Alphabetization of Homer," 18), and speculates that the "alphabetization" of Homer might have been completed by, or perhaps earlier, than 520. The rejection of this late date, Havelock says, is due in large part to the prevailing assumption that Greece is fully literate by 700. This assumption, however, seems to be without warrant.

³⁷ Kirk, "Homer" 45. It should be noted that Kirk does not entirely embrace this argument or its ideas. So too, writes Gregory Nagy: It seems to me self-evident that even an oral tradition can refer to a written tradition without necessarily being influenced by it. I should add in this regard my own conviction that Homeric poetry does indeed refer to the technology of writing, and that such references in no way require us to assume that writing was used for the creation of Homeric poetry (*Homeric Questions* [Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1996] 14).

³⁸ "The Alphabetization of Homer," 4.

³⁹ *The Greek Concept of Justice: From its Shadow in Homer to its Substance in Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978) 226–27.

⁴⁰ Stephane Mallarme, "Funereal Toast" from *Poison and Vision*, trans. David Paul (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 169.

⁴¹ By this I mean that although oral poetry evokes images, and many of these images are evoked through the repeated use of formula such as "the shield of Achilles," I think it is important to note that there is a difference between visualizing a warrior and his shield—as many vase paintings illustrate—and seeing or visualizing the phrase "shield of Achilles" and *then translating*, as it were, from this phrase to an image of a warrior and his shield. Seeing Achilles' shield as an image evoked by a pattern of sound may be, I suggest, different from seeing "the shield of Achilles" as an image evoked from words written on a text.

⁴² That is, ". . . many contemporary students of myth are doubtful whether the same methods of interpretation are valid for a body of oral accounts such as those studied by anthropologists as for the written texts which are the concern of Greek scholars" (Vernant, *Myth and Society*, 187).

⁴³ Note the pessimism of Mircea Eliade concerning the preservation of the myths themselves: "The 'classic' Greek myths already represent the triumph of a literary *work* over religious *belief*. . . The whole *living* and popular side of Greek religion escapes us, precisely because it was not systematically expressed in writing" (*Myth and Reality*, trans. William R. Trask [New York: Harper Torchbooks

1963] 158). Too, although writing before recent dating of the transcription of the epics, F. M. Cornford echoes Eliade's claim: "In the case of most questions of origins, history fails us; the earlier links of the tradition we seek to account for are hidden in prehistoric darkness. The Homeric Epos, for example, comes before us as a finished product, and not a single scrap of documentary evidence records the stages which preceded the earliest parts of the *Iliad*" (*From Religion to Philosophy* [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957] 1).

⁴⁴ Milman Parry (*The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry [Oxford University Press, 1987]), Albert Bates Lord (*Epic Singers and Oral Tradition* [Cornell University Press, 1991]), and Eric Havelock (*Preface to Plato* [Harvard University Press, 1963]), drawing from anthropological and ethnographic investigations into contemporary oral systems, nevertheless all seem to agree that there are possible differences that exist between the living traditions of contemporary Europe and the oral tradition of archaic Greece.

⁴⁵ Gregory Nagy, for one, maintains that the empirical or material fact of the text provides evidence for the cultural factors that give rise to it, and so the issue is not whether we *can* understand the communicative practices and strategies of an oral culture, but it is very important to pay attention to *how* we go about developing our understanding. Eric Havelock also continually reminds us that it "requires some effort of the imagination to comprehend" the conditions within which the written word first entered Greece ("The Alphabetization of Homer," 4).

⁴⁶ John Scheid and Jesper Svenbro, *The Craft of Zeus*, trans. Carol Volk (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 114.

⁴⁷ Cf.: Scheid and Svenbro, *The Craft of Zeus*, who write: "The fate of Thamyris . . . is instructive in this respect, for it shows what happens to a bard who claims to sing better than the Muses and who thus contrasts his private words with those of the divinities of song: Thamyris is struck dumb. In Homer's world, poetry is not private property" (115).

⁴⁸ Hermann Frankel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, 12 (hereafter page numbers will be referenced in the text).

⁴⁹ As discussed in Chapter 5, I question the implication that questions concerning specific characters are somehow exclusive of questions concerning events.

⁵⁰ *Homeric Questions*, 17ff.

⁵¹ Qtd. in Nagy, 17.

⁵² To Frankel's quote (*Early Greek Philosophy*, 7) I would add Nagy's observation that: "oral tradition comes to life in performance, and the here-and-now of each new performance in an opportunity for innovation" (*Homeric Questions*, 19).

⁵³ *The Making of Homeric Verse*, p. 272 (hereafter references will be included in parentheses in the text).

⁵⁴ Note Parry's implication here as elsewhere that an archaic Greek belief in the Muse is a purely symbolic, i.e., practically ineffective, belief.

⁵⁵ Elsewhere, Parry notes that formula tend to come in two types: there are formula that are "like" other formula, and formula which are not like other formula. By "like" Parry means formula that "express a similar idea in more or less the same words." Groups of like formula, according to Parry, make up a "system"

(*The Making of Homeric Verse*, 275ff.). The most systematic formula in the epics appear to be noun-epithet formula in the nominative. Like the example “swift-footed Achilles,” these formula represent gods and heroes, in the main.

⁵⁶ See *The Making of Homeric Verse*, p. 276, for a full chart of the occurrences of this phrasing and its differentiations.

⁵⁷ Seth L. Schein, *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (University of California Press, 1984), 5.

⁵⁸ For example, “with steadfast spirit,” “to question and to ask,” “dear heart was broken,” and “the sun set and shadowed were all the streets” each appear five or more times exclusively in the *Odyssey*, while “but come, tell me this and truthfully declare it” and “when early-born rosy-fingered Dawn appeared” each appear four times and twice respectively in the *Iliad* and thirteen and twenty times respectively throughout the *Odyssey* (Kirk, “Homer,” 50ff.).

⁵⁹ Frankel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, 34 (hereafter references will be included in parentheses in the text).

⁶⁰ Havelock, for one, assumes (1) the thesis that Homer's and Hesiod's poetry is primarily “didactic,” and, relatedly that (2) this imposes tremendous psychological pressure upon the bards. However, it might be difficult to determine whether the epics were written down with the intent and purpose of *paideia*, or whether this purpose was attributed to the epics in *hindsight* of their written form. While Havelock is certainly correct to take note of Plato's criticisms of Homeric *paideia* and to consider these criticisms as central to Plato's *philosophia*, it does not necessarily follow that Plato's, Xenophanes', or even Parmenides' reception of Homer is indicative of the conditions within which Homer orally composed and performed. I suggest that while later criticisms pertain to what the epics became, their original and preliterate function might have been to provide a framework within which human experience is made possible. Yet I also suggest that a “framework” operates very differently than a picture or image that is used to teach, even indirectly. According to Havelock and others, the epics provide very clear “pictures” or images of the appropriate gestures and behaviors to make and engage in social situations. If this is the case, then the epics might be said to *represent* normative guidelines and patterns of general behavior. Yet, it is questionable whether oral poetry, which is “composed not *for* but *in* performance,” can yield the stability and consistency that would seem to be required for *these kinds of didactic purposes*. If it is the case that writing or inscription fixes language as an object to be studied and returned to again and again, then it would seem to follow that the didactic purpose and intent of the epics that Havelock identifies is concomitant with their *written*, and yet not necessarily with their *spoken*, form. While oral performance might be capable of instructing audiences in *how to do something*, there is a significant difference between *showing* someone how to do something and communicating a proposition *p* that someone should believe and apply to daily behavior.

⁶¹ According to Joseph Russo, there are also many different types of formula, and so all “definitions” of formula hereto offered are in some sense correct: “They all correctly identify a particular reality, i.e., a certain level of regularity in the language the poet uses to convey his meaning to his audience.

There are formula operating simultaneously on different levels of language when the poet is reciting his poem . . . [yet all formulae] . . . serves the purpose of communication between poet and listener" ("How, and What, Does Homer Communicate," *Communication Arts in the Ancient World*, 41–2).

⁶² Frankel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, 31 (hereafter references are included in parenthesis in the text).

⁶³ We might understand the communion of sound and sense as a kind of onomatopoeia. Indeed, Havelock writes: "An episode describing martial combat is filled with language noises which recall or are associated with fighting; a banquet scene with words of eating, drinking, and merrymaking . . . There is a high element of onomatopoeia in orally memorized composition" ("The Alphabetization of Homer," 15). Still, and as I think Havelock would agree, our understanding of orally composed and performed onomatopoeia is in hindsight of the literate separation of the sound of a word or phrase from its sense or meaning. I suggest, however, that while such a separation allows for a greater plurality of sense, it also weakens our facility with onomatopoeia. For example, the term "buzz" might be used to represent the sound of bees, but "buzz" might also be associated with a flat-sounding doorbell, or a colloquialism meaning "I'll give you a call." The context in which the sound-word is used can direct us to the sense intended, but as Havelock also notes, "context" is a very literate word and concept.

⁶⁴ In support of this claim, Eric Havelock suggests that the geometric proportions and symmetries emerging throughout the plastic arts in archaic Greece be seen as visual echoes of the acoustic patterns that form the material basis of inspired and authoritative expression (*Preface to Plato*, 128ff.). That is, the visual symmetry and rhythm that emerges in vase painting, pottery, and sculpture reflects the audible symmetry and rhythm of formulaic speech. Here too, then, a system of sound serves as the basis for the emerging visual arts. The sculptor, we might imagine, translates verbal rhythm into visual rhythm, molding idealized speech into idealized shapes. For further support of Havelock's ideas, see Rhys Carpenter, *The Esthetic Basis of Greek Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963) 28ff., as well as Detienne's acknowledged debt to Ernst Cassirer's and Antoine Meillet's suggestion(s) that "language guides ideas, vocabulary is more a conceptual system than a lexicon, and linguistic phenomena relate to institutions, that is, to influential schemata present in techniques, social relations, and the contexts of communicative exchange" (*Masters of Truth*, 19).

⁶⁵ Cf.: Stanley Lombardo, *The Essential Homer*, "A Note on Translation," xxi.

⁶⁶ Here, I refer to Parmenides' use of *esti* in B8, which, whether subjectless or not, may be metrically problematic for his poem, and may signal a departure from, at least, the way oral poetry sounds.

⁶⁷ Cf.: Havelock's *Preface to Plato*, pp. 115ff.

⁶⁸ This does not mean, however, that sight is not a privileged or primary sense in archaic Greek thought. To the contrary, Charles Segal suggests that as important "as the aural experience is for memory and the transmission of culture, Greek thought tends to privilege vision as the primary area of knowledge and even of emotion, as we have seen in Homer" ("Spectator and Listener" in *The*

Greeks, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant and trans. Charles Lambert and Teresa Lavender Fagan [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995] 191). The point, however, is that the archaic Greeks envision spectacle and not a text.

⁶⁹ See Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and The City in Western Civilization* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994) for a discussion of how the body of young Greek males is molded and trained to represent and belong to the *polis*. See also Louis Gernet who suggests that "there exists a very archaic representation that makes certain organs of the body privileged one or gives them a religious value . . . not only the head and the heart but the diaphragm, the lungs, the liver and certain 'humors' . . ." later identified with the soul (*The Anthropology of Ancient Greece*, 9).

⁷⁰ *Myth and Thought among the Greeks* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983) 77ff. (emphasis mine).

⁷¹ It has also been suggested that the presence of catalogs attests to a Boiotian influence, the principle example of which is Hesiod's poetry. While genealogy and catalog abound in Hesiod's poetry, such lists appear incidental to the otherwise running narrative of the Homeric epics (Richard Lattimore, *Hesiod* [Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959] 3). See also Vernant's discussion of catalogs in *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, 78. Interestingly, Vernant maintains that these lists, although of primary importance, do not serve administrative needs, but should be considered as "purely legendary," setting up an "order in the world of the gods and heroes, and to draw up as accurate and complete as possible a record of their names" (emphasis mine).

⁷² See, for example, Detienne in *Masters of Truth*, p. 73ff.

⁷³ Cf.: *Masters of Truth*, Preface and 130ff. Most notably, "Parmenides' *Aletheia* provides the best expression of the ambiguity of first philosophy, which offers the public a knowledge simultaneously declared to be inaccessible to most" (134). Detienne references here Jean-Pierre Vernant's *Origins of Greek Thought* which reads: "Thus secrecy, in contrast to the public character of the official cult, acquired a special religious significance: it defined religion of personal salvation whose goal was to transform the individual independently of the social order . . ." (58).

⁷⁴ *Masters of Truth*, 39ff.

⁷⁵ *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press by Basil Blackwell Publisher, 1985) 182ff.

⁷⁶ "The Greeks and Their Gods" in *The Greeks*, 264. It is interesting to note that while Burkett maintains that the term "Zeus" can be found on a tablet from Knossos (circa. 1250) and so it is not implausible to suggest that a certain theological tradition or system obtains through the Dark Ages (43), Vegetti claims that "Zeus" fixed position in the pantheon is the result of a "narrative that identifies him as a character" (264).

⁷⁷ The tale is quoted in its entirety by Detienne who cites Philo, *De Plantatione* 30.126 (in *Masters of Truth*, 40). The Greek Zeus-Mnemosyne myth, however, is much older, and is "sung" in Hesiod's *Theogony* at 1.3.2.

⁷⁸ *Did the Greeks Believe Their Myths: An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) 59 (hereafter references will be included in parentheses in the text). Paul Veyne remarks

that, "At bottom, myths are authentic historical traditions, for how could one speak of what does not exist? The truth can be altered, but it is impossible to speak of nothing" (59).

⁷⁹ I borrow the phrase "general sense" from Werner Jaeger who observes that Thucydides, for example, does not reproduce the speeches of important statesmen word for word. Rather, Thucydides freely admits that unlike his record of external facts he makes each character say what he feels the situation requires or demands. Hence, Thucydides neither freely interprets what is said by someone else, nor exactly transcribes "what is said" verbatim, but concerns himself with conveying the general sense. A general sense is neither true nor false, but rather fits a given situation (See *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, Volume I—Archaic Greece—The Mind of Athens*, trans. Gilbert Highet [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967]).

⁸⁰ Cf.: Veyne, pp. 59ff.

⁸¹ Detienne reaches the same conclusion, although by a different route, in *Masters of Truth*, 45ff.

⁸² See, for example, Bruce Gottfried's account of the significance of inspired speech in the *Phaedrus* ("Pan, the Cicadas, and Plato's Use of Myth in the *Phaedrus*" in *Plato's Dialogues: New Studies and Interpretations*, ed. Gerald A. Press [Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1993]).

⁸³ Cf.: Veyne, 57.

⁸⁴ According to Detienne's source, Memory's name, *Mneme*, was changed to "Mnemosyne by the common people" (*Masters of Truth*, 41). I use *Mneme* here when delineating the collective family of Memory because the "names" for the "daughters" of Memory do fluctuate from text to text (see fn. 76). But, upon the advice of John Anton, when referring to Memory as Memory I retain the original Greek *Mnemosyne*. I have also excluded references to *Mnemosyne* as the "Virgin Memory" (hereafter all references to *Masters of Truth* will be included in parentheses in the text).

⁸⁵ The multiple aspects of the Muses continue to evolve through the Roman Empire. Cicero, for example, lists two new "nomenclatures"—*Arche*, signifying the poet's ability to reveal primordial reality, and *Thelxinoe*, signifying "the spell cast by sung speech upon the listener" (*Masters of Truth*, 41). What is intriguing here is that what we might consider to be the more deceptive aspects of "sung speech"—its charms and "seduction"—is not included in the archaic aspects of the Muses. For another list of the Muses daughters, see *The Library of Apollodorus*, trans. Michael Simpson (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1978) 15ff.

⁸⁶ The sense of *krainei*—to realize—can be understood in its relation to oracular powers, those associated with "kings of justice," divination (prophecy) and "sung speech." Detienne explains, "The speech of the diviner and of oracular powers, like a poetic pronouncement, defines a particular level of reality: when Apollo prophesies, he 'realizes' (*krainei*). Oracular speech does not reflect an event that has already occurred: it is part of its realization" (73).

⁸⁷ It is in this sense that we can understand Pindar's claim that "Praise touches on Blame" (qtd. Detienne, 47). Blame is a kind of malevolent speech and in "the most ancient religious thought" is signified by *Momos*, one the children of Night

and a brother to *Lethe*, oblivion, silence, or death. As Detienne explains, *Momos* is the “negative aspect” (rather than the “opposite”) of praise; [praise] confronts death by the power of life or “Memory, the mother of the Muses.” (47).

⁸⁸ Pindar, *Nemean*, 8.40ff., qtd. by Detienne, 72.

⁸⁹ Cf.: *Preface to Plato*, pp. 276ff.

⁹⁰ Although in terms of sheer length, Parmenides’ poem “On Nature” has more lines than what is extant from Xenophanes, Parmenides’ “proem” is generally not considered to be “philosophical,” while Xenophanes’ longer or more “prosaic” fragments (B1, B2) are considered *by some* to carry “philosophical” weight.

⁹¹ In Freeman’s *Ancilla*, portions of this fragment read: “It is proper for men who are enjoying themselves first of all to praise God with decent stories and pure words . . . But the man whom one must praise is he who after drinking expresses thoughts that are noble, as well as his memory concerning virtue allows, not treating of the battles of the Titans and Giants . . . in which tales there is nothing useful; but always to have respect for the gods, *that* is good” (B1). Interestingly, Kirk, Raven, Schofield do not include this fragment as it has no “philosophic importance.”

⁹² Also in Freeman’s *Ancilla*, portions of B2 read: “So too if he won a prize with horses, he would obtain all these rewards, though not deserving of them as *I* am; for my craft (wisdom) is better than the strength of men or of horses.”

⁹³ It is true that Xenophanes’ exact place and position in the history of ideas is often contested. While some, such as Jaeger, credit Xenophanes with an abiding religious influence, others, such as Edward Hussey, maintain that his ideas are derivative of the Milesians, and so there is nothing particularly “systematic” nor “original” in his thought (See *The Presocratics* [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1995]). Some, however, maintain that Xenophanes’ influence is as comprehensive as it is underscored. Hence, his “satires” are perhaps the inspiration for Timon’s *silloi*, his “skepticism,” the forerunner of Socratic *aporia* and Pyrrhonian *epoche*, and it is probable that the more renowned Heraclitus and Parmenides were familiar with, if not tutored in, his views on nature, divinity, and *noos*. (See Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 167–68.)

⁹⁴ Frankel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, 328ff.

⁹⁵ From B8 in Freeman’s *Ancilla*, Xenophanes refers to himself as “tossing [his] carefilled heart over the land of Hellas.” The adjective “wandering” I draw from Kirk, Raven, Schofield, “a wandering life,” 164.

⁹⁶ *Pace* the claim in Kirk, Raven, Schofield that although Xenophanes “was a poet and sage, a singer of his own songs rather than those of others: he was certainly not . . . a Homeric ‘rhapsode’ (164), they do admit that Xenophanes composes in verse; Freeman identifies at least thirty of these verses as hexameters. As such Xenophanes is a Homeric rhapsode to the extent he is trained in the language and materials of sung speech, and as he himself says: Since from the beginning all have learnt in accordance with Homer . . .” (B10 in Freeman’s *Ancilla*).

⁹⁷ Even speaking in evolutionary terms, the “what”—hominids—seem to become “who’s,” i.e. beings with identity or, depending upon the parameters of the discussion, “us.”

- ⁹⁸ Of course the idea that our language in some way distorts or misrepresents natural phenomena is just the flipside of the extended argument that Richard Rorty critiques throughout *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. The problem is not whether or how language can accurately represent nature, but why and where the idea first took hold that mind or language can—or should—mirror “reality.” The paradigm of the mirror presupposes a “lacuna” or “gap” between language and reality, and yet, as Rorty suggests in criticism of Kuhn, why should the presence of a lacuna be felt so acutely: “The notion that we are faced by a challenge to fill this lacuna is one more result of hypostatizing the Platonic *focus imaginarius* . . . and allowing the gap between oneself and that unconditional ideal to make one feel that one does not yet understand the conditions of one’s existence” (*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 340).
- ⁹⁹ Many of these issues are broached in Lisa A. Wilkinson, “Xenophanes’ Respectful Conversation with Nature,” included in *Philosophy and Ecology: Greek Philosophy and the Environment, Volume I*, ed. Konstantine Boudouris and Kostas Kalimtzis (Athens: International Center for Greek Philosophy and Culture, 1999).
- ¹⁰⁰ Or, rather, a suburban environment is contrived to *appear* more natural than an urban or commercial environment.
- ¹⁰¹ Martin Heidegger, for example, maintains that what differentiates the stone, the lizard, and the human being is a linguistic capacity which *in itself* is an origin and source of reflection. In phenomenological terms, the capacity might be described as the difference between consciousness and self-consciousness, and in epistemological terms it might be described as the knowing *that* one knows. It is this *knowing that* which encourages inquiry into what and how one knows. And whether *what one knows* are propositions or phenomena, or a bit of both and more, humans—and perhaps anthropomorphic deities—are the only entities to ask such questions.
- ¹⁰² It might also be said that our language and our intelligence are not “natural” in the way birds, bears, and fish are “natural” or possess their own *type of* “natural intelligence.”
- ¹⁰³ Diels, H. *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (B Edition), translated in Kathleen Freeman’s *Ancilla*: “And she whom they call Iris, she too is actually a cloud, purple and flame-red and yellow to behold.”
- ¹⁰⁴ The characteristics of the One God are taken from a combination of Fragments 23, 24, 25, and 26 in Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- ¹⁰⁵ Kirk, Raven, Schofield, for example, maintain that “it is possible that [Xenophanes’] motive for giving physical explanations of the heavenly bodies was to disprove the popular conception of them as gods” (174). Hermann Fränkel echoes this explanation when he writes: “The absolute does not fit into human modes of representation precisely because they are especially adapted to the grasping of what is earthly. Xenophanes separated these two regions from one another plainly and fundamentally. He strips visible celestial phenomena of all divine aspects; he even denies these phenomena their dignity and permanence, as well as their celestial origin, just as, on the other hand, he refuses to recognize all possible comparison of his God with earthly

bodies" ("Xenophanes' Empiricism and His Critique of Knowledge (B34)," in *The Pre-Socratics: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alexander P. D. Mourelatos [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994]) 130ff.

¹⁰⁶ I refer here again to the tale of the origin of "sung speech," the realization (*krainei*) of the family of Muses (the family of *Mnemosyne*) in accordance with the approval of "Father of All" to the prophet's praise of creation.

¹⁰⁷ That is, we do not possess the *ipsisissima verba* of Thales, and from Anaximander, we possess, at best, a statement or a fragment of a statement. What Pythagoras "says" is transcribed by his "disciples," but sources differ as to the authenticity of these transcriptions. Hence, the amount of fragments attributed to Xenophanes or about Xenophanes suggests the extent of his reputation in antiquity.

¹⁰⁸ The following quotations are taken from B2, a lengthy fragment which is recorded in Freeman's *Ancilla* as: "But if anyone were to win a victory with fleetness of foot, or fighting in the Pentathlon, where the precinct of Zeus lies between the springs of Pisa at Olympia, or in wrestling, or in virtue of the painful science of boxing, or in a dread kind of contest called Pancration: to the citizens he would be more glorious to look upon, and he would acquire a conspicuous seat of honour at competitions, and his maintenance would be provided out of the public stores by the City-State, as well as a gift for him to lay aside as treasure."

"So too if he won a prize with his horses, he would obtain all these rewards, though not deserving of them as I am; for my craft (wisdom) is better than the strength of men or of horses. Yet opinion is altogether confused in this matter, and it is not right to prefer physical strength to noble Wisdom. For it is not the presence of a good boxer in the community, nor of one good at the Pentathlon or at wrestling, nor even of one who excels in fleetness of foot—which is highest in honour of all the feats of strength seen in men's athletic contests—it is not these that will give a City-State a better constitution. Small would the enjoyment that a City-State would reap over the athletic victory of a citizen beside the banks of Pisa! These things do not enrich the treasure-chambers of the State."

¹⁰⁹ *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture—Volume I: Archaic Greece—The Mind of Athens*, trans. Gilbert Highet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) 174.

¹¹⁰ Maurice Bowra, qtd. in W. K. C. Guthrie's *History of Greek Philosophy—Volume I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962) 365.

¹¹¹ See "The Economy of Kudos" in *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece: Cult, Performance, Politics*, ed. Carol Dougherty and Leslie Kurke (Oxford University Press, Inc.: 1998) (hereafter references will be included in parentheses in the text).

¹¹² Who comprise "the aristocracy" is a complicated issue. I understand Kurke to mean a group of genealogically self-sustaining propertied Athenian citizens whose sociopolitical power and wealth is increasingly threatened by ancient democratic reform.

¹¹³ Alternatively, Kirk, Raven, Schofield maintain that Xenophanes makes, as far as we know, no political pronouncements and it is for this reason that Heraclitus criticizes him (*The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, 168); and see Heraclitus B40: "Learning of many things does not teach intelligence; if so it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and again Xenophanes and Hecataeus."

- ¹¹⁴ Kurke uses the term “talisman” to connote the power or force of divine favor, but I caution against thinking of “talisman” in relation to other terms like magic, sorcery, etc. *Kudos* is a power or force with its source in the divine but an archaic understanding of divine is not necessarily synonymous with our understanding of “supernatural,” and so *kudos* should not be confused with other powers or forces that characterize the vocabularies of alchemy, occult science, new age metaphysics, or the like.
- ¹¹⁵ Detienne, *Masters of Truth*, 46.
- ¹¹⁶ From *Hesiod*, trans. Richard Lattimore (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1988).
- ¹¹⁷ B18 in Freeman’s *Ancilla*: “Truly the gods have not revealed to mortals all things from the beginning; but mortals by long seeking discover what is better.”
- ¹¹⁸ See Hermann Frankel’s discussion of the importance of *autos oida*, “I know it from my own experience” to Xenophanes’ thought in “Xenophanes’ Empiricism and His Critique of Knowledge.” Freeman translates B34: “And as for certain truth, no man has seen it, nor will there ever be a man who knows about the gods and about all the things I mention. For if he succeeds to the full in saying what is completely true, he himself is nevertheless unaware of it; and Opinion (seeming) is fixed by fate upon all things.”
- ¹¹⁹ *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers: The Gifford Lectures 1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 49.
- ¹²⁰ Kirk, Raven, Schofield, *Presocratic Philosophers*.
- ¹²¹ Freeman and McKirahan, translate this term as “behold” while Robinson translates this term as “sight.”
- ¹²² Moreover, this use of *idesthai* is completely compatible with the tradition of “sung speech.” Charles Segal observes that, “The Homeric warrior stands before us, in the recurrent epic formula, as a ‘wonder to behold,’ *thauma idesthai*” (“Spectator and Listener,” p. 185).
- ¹²³ Cf.: Frankel’s conclusion that even after “stripping” nature of its dignity and divine origin, “Xenophanes . . . [still] sensed behind and above this firmly and securely believed, this narrow and crudely mechanical world of coming-to-be (B29) and passing away, a broader and higher world that enclosed the transcendent along with the immanent” (131).
- ¹²⁴ In “Heraclitus and Plato on the Language of the Real,” (*Monist*, October 1991) Tom Robinson suggests that Heraclitus (B30) conceived of the real as alive. As *physis* is a part of the real, it follows that *physis* is also alive, and so not only intelligent but intelligible.
- ¹²⁵ *Mortal and Immortals: Collected Essays*, ed. Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 153.
- ¹²⁶ Kirk, Raven, Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*.
- ¹²⁷ That is, Xenophanes’ monotheism is said to apparently contradict this new “theological” concept, i.e. the concept of a greatest God (See Kirk, Raven, Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, John Mansley Robinson, *An Introduction to Early Greek Philosophy* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968], Richard D. McKirahan, Jr. *Philosophy Before Socrates* [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994], and Patricia Curd, *A Presocratics Reader: Selected*

Fragments and Testimonia, trans. Richard D. McKirahan, Jr. [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996]). To argue that the phrase “greatest among gods and men” does not undermine Xenophanes’ monotheism, the expression is said to be an epithet “leftover” from the oral tradition or an example of a “polar” expression that is used to emphasize an idea by creating its “extreme.” Hence, while the phrase “among gods” internally contradicts Xenophanes’ monotheism, we can explain away this apparent contradiction by appeal to a poetic practice which Xenophanes either manipulates to his own end or employs, out of habit, as an “empty phrase.” While an “empty phrase” may occur here and there in ordinary speech, we cannot assume that any archaic poet would be so glib about the formulaic content of “sung speech.” It is more likely that the phrase is, indeed, “leftover” and that it is used for rhythmical as well as conceptual effect. The intent of this effect, however, probably has less to do with monotheism than it does with distinguishing characteristics of divinity in general, i.e., those characteristics articulated in the communicative practices of “sung speech.”

¹²⁸ *Philosophy before Socrates*, 62, fnt. 7.

¹²⁹ *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 170.

¹³⁰ Detienne, *Masters of Truth*, 71ff.

¹³¹ In the following I paraphrase over Xenophanes’ apparent line of thought from a collection of fragments that Kirk, Raven, and Schofield list together (B11, B14, B16, and B15). Their translation is: “Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods everything that is a shame and reproach among men, stealing and committing adultery and deceiving each other (166). But mortals consider that the gods are born, and that they have clothes and speech and bodies like their own (167). The Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black, the Thracians that theirs have light blue eyes and red hair (168). But if cattle and horses or lions had hands, or were able to draw with their hands and do the works that men can do, horses would draw the forms of the gods like horses, and cattle like cattle, and they would make their bodies such as they each had themselves” (*The Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 168–69).

¹³² Few scholars question the validity of Xenophanes’ “moral” claims. For example, Kirk, Raven, Schofield explain: “. . . the gods of Homer and Hesiod are often immoral—this is patently true” (169). But that we might agree with Xenophanes only invalidates the strength or force of Homer and Hesiod within our culture. It in no way inviolates the strength and force of “sung speech” in archaic Greece. And so the question must be asked, not whether Xenophanes’ is morally correct, but from where and how his criticisms arise.

¹³³ *Masters of Truth*, 109ff.

¹³⁴ Detienne also suggests that the “self-consciousness” or “self-referential” character of poetry, and speech, is exemplified in Simonides: “Simonides identifies the very moment when the poet, in turn, came to recognize himself through his speech.” According to Detienne, such a “recognition” ruptures the tradition of the inspired poet for whom speaking “came as naturally as breathing” (109–10).

¹³⁵ According to Walter Burkett: “Ritual and myth are the two forms in which Greek religion presents itself to the historian of religion. There are no

founding figures and no documents of revelation, no organizations of priests and no monastic orders. The religion finds legitimation as tradition by proving itself a formative force of continuity from generation to generation . . . As communication and social imprinting, ritual establishes and secures the solidarity of the closed group; in this function it has doubtless accompanied the forms of human community since the earliest of times" (*Greek Religion*, 8).

¹³⁶ Cf.: John Scheid and Jesper Svenbro, *The Craft of Zeus*, wherein the difference between Homeric and choral poetry is discussed in terms of verbal "weaving": ". . . whereas verbal 'weaving' defines the receiver of the spoken words as an other, a stranger or a hostile party, the [Homeric] bard's song presupposes an identification between the sender and the receiver that makes the metaphor [of weaving] unsuitable" (115).

¹³⁷ Jacques Derrida, for instance, uses the term *differer*—not to be confused with *difference*—to refer, in part, to what I call here a "basic difference" (see *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973]).

¹³⁸ Of course we do say that one can "talk to oneself" or to an audience that cannot or does not "talk back"—an autistic person, a person not present or deceased, etc. By "at least two speakers" I mean that the very act of speaking presupposes an address to a nonidentical "other." That "other" is a target or "object," as it were, for our speaking.

¹³⁹ Derrida, "Difference," in *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, 136.

¹⁴⁰ Here I refer to philosophical analyses of communication that presuppose something like a Cartesian-Kantian notion of autonomy, that is, every speaker and listener is an (ontologically, epistemologically) distinct entity. Yet, for communication to be at all possible, every speaker and listener must also share in some basic cognitive abilities, and this is so either because the human mind is hardwired for language acquisition, or because the human world is structured or organized—in part or in whole—by and through language.

¹⁴¹ Even if we set aside foreign language barriers and sociocultural differences such as class, race, gender, level of education, etc., few would deny that there are occasions when, say, an English-speaking theist and an English-speaking atheist can no longer "speak" to one another.

¹⁴² Here I refer to the "malapropisms" Donald Davidson writes of in "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs," *Philosophical Grounds of Rationality*, ed. R. Granley and R. Warner (Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹⁴³ I am adopting vocabulary and classifications from "Dialogic Discourse" (Voloshinov/Bakhtin) in *The Bakhtin Reader*, ed. Pam Morris (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), 26 (hereafter references will be included in parentheses in the text).

¹⁴⁴ *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. R. J. Harris (London: Duckworth, 1983), 13–14, qtd. in *The Bakhtin Reader*, pp. 30–1.

¹⁴⁵ Nagy explains the experience of oral poetic composition and performance—for singers and audience alike—in terms of questions and the "unchangeable" or "permanent" character of response (*hupokrinesthai*): "The mentality of unchangeability, where the response to the question [i.e., like the interpretation

of a dream or vision] is always the exact same thing said in the exact same words, is signalled here again by the word *hupokrinesthai*" (from "The Spirit of Homer" a paper comprising part of a larger research project presented at a forum for Interdisciplinary Hellenic Education, at the University of South Florida, March 1, 2001). The writing down of the epics is an effect, Nagy goes on to say, rather than a cause of the "mentality of unchangeability." While I might question the "notional sameness" of audibly and aurally created and affected visions, Nagy's insights—here as elsewhere—strengthen the idea that performance is crucial to oral poetic experience and our understanding of it.

¹⁴⁶ Cf.: fnt. in "Introduction" from *How to Do Things with Words*, 74.

¹⁴⁷ With this claim, as some have noted, Saussure arguably reduces all "individualistic subjectivist" accounts of speech to the level of "anecdote."

¹⁴⁸ From *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure distinguishes between the utterance (the individual speech act which he terms *parole*), language as a system of forms (*langue*), and language-speech (*langage*) which means "the sum total of all phenomena [physical, physiological, psychical] . . . involved in the realization of verbal activity" (qtd. in *The Bakhtin Reader*, 30). *Langage*, however, is also not a possible object for study because it contains physical, physiological, and psychical elements.

¹⁴⁹ In "Plato's Dialogues as Enactments," Gerald Press similarly argues that while many philosophers are willing to grant that the dialogues are performances—like plays—of Socratic conversations, the "what" of what is being performed takes precedence. In this way, what the dialogues "do" is *represent* "what" the character Socrates says. The activity of the characters, then, is still considered just an embellishment, a literary flourish, or a performative echo of "what" they say (see *The Third Way: New Directions in Platonic Studies*).

¹⁵⁰ Rather, the activity of speaking cannot be separated from the meaning of speech. In nonliterate speech acts "meaning is conveyed by the tone, cadence and phrasing in and with which words are uttered. One does not consider first the meaning of the words and then look at the expression on the speaker's face . . ." (Joanne Waugh and Lisa Wilkinson, "Communicating Philosophy: Platonic Dialogue and Socratic Method," *Philosophy and Communication*, ed. Konstantine Boudouris and Takis Poulakos (Athens: International Center for Greek Philosophy and Culture, 2001)).

¹⁵¹ Joanne Waugh and Lisa Wilkinson, "Fleshing Out the Form of Beauty: An Anti-Representational Theory of Forms," *Plato's Forms* [Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. (Lanham, Maryland, 2003)].

¹⁵² For example, the series of letters "szcgl" is not meaningful in the English language because—to my knowledge—it does not stand, and never has stood, in any relation to any other term, "object," or "thing." The series of letter "szcgl," then, is not a sign. In the absence of a signified, wherefrom a signifier—and conversely?

¹⁵³ "What Metaphors Mean" in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984] 263 (emphasis mine).

¹⁵⁴ Detienne, *Masters of Truth*, 99.

¹⁵⁵ This point is also made by Joanne Waugh with regard to our understanding of Plato's dialogues: "When speakers and hearers are present to each other, they

can repeat and rephrase and question what is being said until it is understood. Language and meaning thus exist in the embodied actions of speaker and hearer; they are written on the body, as Foucault reminds us. But this metaphor in which the body is metaphorically a text needs to be turned around, for [in ancient Greece] it is the text that stands in for an embodied speaker” “Socrates and the Character of Platonic Dialogues” in *Who Speaks for Plato?* [Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. (Lanham, Maryland, 2000)] 42).

¹⁵⁶ I owe this insight to Joanne Waugh.

¹⁵⁷ Cf.: Gallop, *Parmenides of Elea*, fnt. 11, p. 30.

¹⁵⁸ See Cornford, 30. See also Barnes, “The poem began with a long allegorical prologue, the interpretation of which is for the most part of little philosophical importance” (qtd. Curd, 19, from *Presocratic Philosophy*, Volume I, 156).

¹⁵⁹ See Patricia Curd, *The Legacy of Parmenides* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 18–23. Curd observes that the proem “has been alternatively exhaustively analyzed and ignored” (19). Scholars such as Frankel, Bowra, Verdenius, Mansfeld, Taran, Guthrie, Burkert, Furley, Coxon, Barnes, and Floyd, offer “various interpretations” of the proem, some of which are dismissive, and some mentioned within my analysis.

¹⁶⁰ Perhaps complementary to, or following Havelock’s lead, Schwabl, Mourelatos, Coxon, Kingsley, and Burkert, have written on the epical or “mythic” allusions in the proem (see Curd, pp. 19ff.).

¹⁶¹ Cf.: fnt. 14 from “Introduction” concerning A. H. Coxon’s findings in *The Fragments of Parmenides* [Assen—The Netherlands: Van Gorcum and Comp., 1986].

¹⁶² Cf.: Plato’s *Republic*, 607b: “But in case we are charged with a certain harshness and lack of sophistication, let’s also tell poetry that there is an ancient quarrel between it and philosophy . . .” (*Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve, Hackett Publishers, 1992). Of course, how one interprets this comment influences whether one thinks the ancient quarrel is also mentioned in *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, and *Ion*.

¹⁶³ Here I follow David Gallop’s *Parmenides of Elea* (University of Toronto Press, 1984), but will note instances where I differ from Gallop’s translation or emendations.

¹⁶⁴ Detienne, *Masters of Truth*, 99.

¹⁶⁵ According to Burkert’s *Greek Religion*, “initiation” practices generally involve very young boys, perhaps like the “youth” of Parmenides’ poem. But while initiatory practices seem focused upon securing or admitting these youth into their “tribes,” many initiations were enacted over a period of years which included the physical and moral training (i.e., education) of the boys (cf.: 260–64). Adult initiations often took place among “secret societies” and might have symbolized practice for, or overcoming, the fear of “death” (cf.: 276–78). Either way, the pursuit of intellectual “enlightenment” does not seem to be the primary—or only—focus of ancient Greek initiatory practices.

¹⁶⁶ Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy—Volume I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962) 11ff.

¹⁶⁷ Cf.: Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*, pp. 49–70.

¹⁶⁸ It is perhaps useful to consider Jaeger’s analysis of “Parmenides Mystery of Being” from *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*. Jaeger maintains, *pace*

Reinhardt, that “the philosophical speculation with which the Greeks were constantly aiming to grasp the totality of existence performed a truly religious function and gave rise to a peculiar religion of the intellect . . . which confronts us in that new intellectual type—the philosopher” (p. 91). With this in mind, Jaeger focuses his attention upon where and to what extent Parmenides manipulates and expands upon traditional religious conceptions. Jaeger’s approach is meant to remind us that the question concerning the religious significance of Parmenides’ poem is, at heart, a question about Parmenides’ unique role in changing religious conceptions. Hence, we err when we attempt to map literally the imagery of the poem upon the imagery culled from ancient religions.

¹⁶⁹ In fact, ambiguity surrounding who and how certain parts of Parmenides’ poem came to be written down and preserved—and other parts lost—actually supports the claim that Parmenides intended his philosophical poem for an aural and not a visual reception.

¹⁷⁰ “Parmenides and Odysseus,” from *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 63 (1958) 136 (hereafter references will be included in parentheses in the text).

¹⁷¹ Here I deviate from Gallop’s translation—he brackets [it] as the implied subject.

¹⁷² See Mourelatos’ discussion of *dizeis* as a term apparently coined by Parmenides and used in conjunction with *odoi* as indicative of a “quest” (67). Havelock, as well, has noted that *odos* and its correlatives—*keleuthos* and *atarpos*—are repeated thirteen times throughout the fragments, and are significantly paired with derivatives of *dizeis* at B2.2, B6.3, B7.2, and B8.6 (“Parmenides and Odysseus,” p. 137, fnts. 26, 38). Hence, the “Homeric motif of the journey,” as Mourelatos terms it, is emphasized by Parmenides as a “quest.”

¹⁷³ Cf.: Guthrie: “It is a journey from Night to Day” (9); Kranz’s interpretation (criticized by Havelock) of the youth as a kind of “Phaethon,” traversing the heavens from west (sunset) to east (sunrise); Heidegger’s discussion of Parmenides’ *aletheia* as a presencing, a “shining forth” (pp. 90ff.); Mourelatos’ claim that we read the goal of the “quest” as a type of “illumination” which enables us, via the “revelation” offered to the *Kouros*, to consider “the unqualified simplicity of what-is or truth” (40); and Vlastos, “the mind’s power to think being must imply just such a power to divest itself completely of the darkness . . . merge itself wholly with the light, and thus be as changeless as light, on all sides the same with itself” (“Parmenides’ Theory of Knowledge” from *Studies in Greek Philosophy: Volume I The Presocratics*, ed. Daniel W. Graham [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993]).

¹⁷⁴ *The Route of Parmenides*, pp. 241ff. (hereafter references will be included in parentheses in the text).

¹⁷⁵ Cf.: Curd, “[D]espite claims to the contrary, the topography of the poem is confusing, and I do not think it is clear where the *kouros* has gone” (19, and n46). While Coxon writes that the “journey” is anticipatory of death, Mourelatos also concludes that the topography is “blurred beyond recognition,” and Frankel writes “there is no route that can be identified.”

¹⁷⁶ The Greek that is translated “representation” reads: *μίμητικαίς*. Cf.: Richard McKeon’s translation as “imitative arts” in *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941).

¹⁷⁷ Loeb Classical Library, Volume XXIII, *Poetics*, viii, 3–5.

¹⁷⁸ Here I refer to Plato's account in Book X of *Republic* that is often interpreted as levels of representation or imitation. But, Gerald Else shows that *mimesis* is rarely used in the fifth century, as is the term *mimos* from which *mimesis* might derive (See G. F. Else, "'Imitation' in the Fifth Century," *Classical Philology*, LIII, 2 (1958) 73–90. Jean-Pierre Vernant's "The Birth of Images" also troubles the standard interpretation of ancient *mimesis* in *Mortals and Immortals* (Princeton University Press, 1991). Nevertheless, "copying," "imitating," and the like are components of our representationalism.

¹⁷⁹ Quine's *Philosophy of Logic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970) provides one such account of contemporary notions of "truth."

¹⁸⁰ *Heraclitus Seminar*, Martin Heidegger and Eugene Fink, trans. Charles H. Seibert (Evanston: Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1993) 161.

¹⁸¹ To say *x* is true is a "second order" statement: determining or judging a statement to be true presupposes the possibility "of truth," or, to borrow Heidegger's term, a "clearing" in or through which Heidegger might say someone or something is made present, *and then is determined or recognized* as true. Thus, only *on the basis* of a possibility or "clearing" in which someone or something is made present can we speak or think of what we recognize as "truth." Heidegger, however, seems more concerned with the possibility or "clearing" itself—what we might call a "first order" process or understanding of that which makes truth possible, or that which "clears" the way for truth.

¹⁸² Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. Andre Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) (hereafter all page numbers will be referenced in the text). It should be noted here that Heidegger's understanding of *aletheia* as "unconcealment" has been most notably challenged by Paul Friedlander (*Plato I: An Introduction*, translated by Hans Meyerhoff [New York: Pantheon, 1958]). In this work, and its three revisions—all to which Heidegger responds—Friedlander argues—among other things—that with one single exception in Hesiod, *aletheia* or *alethes* "always occur connected with, and dependent on, verbs of assertion" (qtd. Michael Naas, "Keeping Homer's Word" in *The Presocratics after Heidegger*, ed. David C. Jacobs [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999] 84–5). To Friedlander's philological and etymological evidence—drawn primarily from the Homeric texts—Heidegger does not object. Naas observes, however, that while it might appear that Heidegger "retracts" his understanding of *aletheia* in light of Friedlander's criticisms, it is also quite possible—as Robert Bernasconi also shows (*The Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being* [Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1985])—that Heidegger's "retractions" serve to strengthen rather than weaken the place of *aletheia* in Heidegger's thinking. While Friedlander proceeds in terms of the conventions of "historical scholarship," Heidegger might say that "historical scholarship" is a "second order" process, dependent upon the correspondence of terms to texts. In this way, "historical scholarship" allows us to speak and think true statements preserved in documents. Heidegger's approach, however, might be described as concerned with the very notion of what it means to *speak and think truthfully*. According to Naas and Bernasconi, it is not

a matter of going back to Homer “to recover an understanding of *aletheia* that was thought and revealed in him but then lost or forgotten” (Naas, 92). Rather, since from the beginning (i.e., since Homer) *aletheia* is connected to speech, this only proves that “language perhaps also is under the sway of unconcealment . . . that already in Homer the possibility to think *aletheia* as *a-letheia* was blocked” (qtd. from Bernasconi in Naas, 92). Concealment, then, is already present in the first records of *aletheia*. That is, concealment is already present in the de-emphasis of the alpha privative: “the concealment within *a-letheia* that is itself concealed when it is reduced to the relationship between things and words” (Naas, 92).

¹⁸³ In our parlance—at least—a negation is also a statement: “Some x is not y ” or “It is not the case that no x is y .” But, since these statements do not directly help us assess and understand “what x is,” its truth value—according to the canons of elementary logic—is ultimately derivative of statements that affirm what x is. For example, while from the statement “It is not the case that all cows are brown” I might be able to infer that this or that cow is not brown, it does not necessarily follow that this or that cow is white, spotted, etc. Put simply, saying what x is not is not equivalent to saying what x is. Since the possibilities for stating what x is not are seemingly infinite, affirmations of what x is cannot be ultimately derived from negative statements: somewhere along the line I must be able to affirm “This cow is brown” for there would seem to be no way of reaching this affirmation from statements that “This cow is not purple,” “This cow is not green,” etc.

¹⁸⁴ *A New Aristotle Reader*, ed. J. L. Ackrill (Princeton University Press, 1987).

¹⁸⁵ It might be worthwhile to add that, according to Aristotle then, truth is not—as some students of the Academy might have held—a “form.” Still, Aristotle’s account of what is properly true or false might not be—or might not count as part of—a refutation of Plato’s supposed “theory of forms” because a “form” of truth is not made explicit in any of the dialogues we attribute to Plato. Whether Aristotle is making explicit—in writing—what is generally said about truth, or whether he is, in fact, offering a different account of truth, I submit that it is to Aristotle that we must initially turn to understand our inheritance “of truth.”

¹⁸⁶ See “Aristotle and Post-Classical Ontologies” and “The Meaning of *Kategoria*” in *Categories and Experience: Essays on Aristotelian Themes* (Dowling College Press, 1996), 204 (hereafter references will be included by page number in the text).

¹⁸⁷ That “the classification of things is not really a function of the theory of categories” but encompasses several inquiries, is a point often overlooked in interpretations of the categories. The several inquiries include psychology, physics, and the “art of correct talking and reasoning” (See: John Anton, “Aristotle’s Theory of Categories” in *Categories and Experience*, 171).

¹⁸⁸ See Willard Van Orman Quine, “Meaning and Truth” in *Philosophy of Logic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

¹⁸⁹ By “correspondence theory of truth or meaning” I mean an account that attempts to explain in terms of logical equivalence what is considered by us to be ontologically distinct: the statement “snow is white” is true if and only if snow is, *in fact*, white. The meaning of the words—“snow is white”—is determined to be true if this meaning corresponds or accords with a “fact” of

the physical world—the object. While Quine, for one, wonders how we are expected to understand the *fact* that snow is white without appealing to and endorsing the meaning of the statement “snow is white,” the idea that the world can be reduced to what we say about it, and *vice versa*, yields—in the extreme—a type of linguistic determinism supported by some post-classical analyses and theories of language, but perhaps quite foreign to an ancient understanding of language and *logos*.

¹⁹⁰ I am grateful to John Anton for this phrasing and insight.

¹⁹¹ Martin Heidegger, “*Logos* (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50)” in *Early Greek Thinking: The Dawn of Western Philosophy*, translated by David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (San Francisco, California: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1984) pp. 77–8, emphasis mine. For further discussion of the difference(s) between language as instrumental and expressive and the “essence of language,” see “The Origin of a Work of Art” (also in *Basic Writings*) and *Parmenides*, pp. 73ff.

¹⁹² From *Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell (San Francisco, California: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1993). Heidegger’s “makeshift” translation reads: “Now, whatever it is [that transpires] in the creation of sound by the voice is a showing of whatever affections there may be in the soul, and the written is a showing of the sounds of the voice. Hence, just as writing is not identical among all [human beings], so too the sounds of the voice are not identical. However, that of which these [sounds and writing] are in the first place a showing are among all [human beings] the identical affections of the soul; and the matters of which these [the affections] form approximating presentations are likewise identical” (Heidegger refers to this passage as “at the outset” of Aristotle’s treatise which Heidegger calls “On Utterance”).

¹⁹³ Heidegger is referring to *De interpretatione*, chaps. 1–6, *Metaphysics* VII.4, and *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.

¹⁹⁴ In *Being and Time*—at least—Heidegger understands and translates *ousia* as *presence*: “genuine beings . . . are conceived as presence (*ousia*)” (22). (Hereafter references will be included by page number in the text.)

¹⁹⁵ *Parmenides*, p. 22 (hereafter references will be included in parentheses in the text).

¹⁹⁶ The following observations are taken from my “Parmenides Fragmented Truth: Putting the Pieces Back Together” in *Greek Philosophy and Epistemology, Volume I*, edited by Konstantine Boudouris (Athens, Greece: International Center for Greek Philosophy and Culture, 2001).

¹⁹⁷ Gallop notes that in B2.4 the term *aletheini* is an emendation for *alethein* in the manuscript. Also, of the uses or instances in the entire poem we hear *aletheia*, at B1.29–30, “Both the steadfast heart of persuasive truth And the belief of mortals, in which there is no true trust”; at B8.69, “Having been driven far off, and true trust has thrust them out”; at B8.39, “That mortals have established, trusting them to be true”; and at B8.50–1, “Here I stop my trustworthy speech to you and Thought about truth.”

¹⁹⁸ *Parmenides of Elea*, p. 30.

¹⁹⁹ *The Route of Parmenides*, 158.

²⁰⁰ It is important to note that Mourelatos does make this direct claim. He seems more concerned with the disposition of the “youth” than the “true identity”

of the goddess. Still, Mourelatos does name the goddess *Peitho*. Although I do not agree that the goddess can be so “named,” once this name is admitted into the text, I believe the inferences I make are warranted.

²⁰¹ According to Taran, *Parmenides*, (34), Verdenius argues—citing B8.50, 51: “Here I stop my trustworthy speech to you, About truth,”—that “the subject” of *esti* is Truth. For if “truth” is the subject of the goddess’ speech, it follows that truth is also the subject of *esti*. In other words, if what-is is the speech, and the speech is true, then what-is is true. Taran argues that Verdenius’ suggestion amounts to a *non sequitur*: “with the same kind of argument one could deduce that the subject is Being” (34). But I concur with Verdenius at least to the extent that, as Mourelatos points out, truth cannot be distinguished from the goddess’ speech. Taran also relies upon a distinction between “truth” and “Being” to make his point, but, of course, one of the apparent riddles of the poem is whether Parmenides would concur that such a distinction exists.

²⁰² *The Route of Parmenides*, 160.

²⁰³ Qtd. In Gallop, p. 5, from Furley, “Parmenides,” *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
²⁰⁴ Again I follow Gallop’s sources in *Parmenides of Elea*.

²⁰⁵ I have also deleted the first “that” from Gallop’s translation because in the full line—*n men opos estiv te kai os ouk esti me einai*—the comparison introduced by *men* but absent *de* might be translated innumerable ways and not necessarily as “that” to echo the *os* which seems to serve as a conjunction. Some might object, including Taran who observes that textual parallels between lines 3 and 5 mean that “*opos* = *os*” (L. Taran, *Parmenides* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965) 35ff. If Taran is correct, if *os* is indeed a conjunctive “that,” then Gallop’s first “that” is a valid translation.

²⁰⁶ Here I delete the bracketed [it] from Gallop’s translation, but retain Gallop’s “what-is” as translation of *eon* or its derivatives.

²⁰⁷ John Mansley Robinson, *An Introduction to Early Greek Philosophy* (Houghton Mifflin, 1968).

²⁰⁸ Richard D. Mckirahan, Jr., *Philosophy before Socrates* (Hackett Publishing, 1994).

²⁰⁹ As Mourelatos suggests, the most popular candidate for an “understood subject” for *esti* is “what-is” or “Being.” But also “reality,” “the One,” “the Route,” and even “what can be thought or spoken of” have been suggested and argued for and against (*The Route of Parmenides*, 270–71). Among the most notable proponents of an “understood subject” not specifically mentioned here are: Cornford (*Plato and Parmenides*, 1939), Burnet (*Early Greek Philosophy*, 1930), Verdenius (*Parmenides. Some Comments on his Poem*, 1942) and Owen (*Classical Quarterly*, 1960).

²¹⁰ Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides*, 1970, Calogero, *Studi sull’ eleatismo*, 1932, Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice*, 1978, Waugh, in conversation.

²¹¹ *The Route of Parmenides*, 274.

²¹² Mourelatos has developed “six distinct patterns” which characterize possible constructions for a subjectless *esti*. These are: (1) <a> exists in the sense “it exists,” (2) “there is an x such that x is F,” (3) “there is an x such that x exists” or “some being exists,” (4) “There is a thing which has some property or other,” (5) “There is a _____,” and (6) “_____ is _____.” While most scholars offer interpretation consistent with (1) and (2), into (3) Mourelatos

puts Raven, Frankel, and Kranz. Calogero and Furth come under (5) or (6). Taran comes under (5), Kahn under (6) and so too Mourelatos himself, at the writing of his text, falls into (6): "The most plausible logical pattern for an interpretation of Parmenides' *esti* is . . ." "it is so" or "how it is" (*The Route of Parmenides*, Appendix II, pp. 269–76).

²¹³ Commenting upon the transition from the proem to the Way of Truth, Gadamer writes ". . . after the salutation the goddess announces to the poet that she wants to teach him many things. It is extremely suggestive, however that the verbs are frequently used here in the iterative form, that is, in a form that corresponds neither to the thought of inspiration nor that of sudden revelation, but rather seems to indicate that of something repetitive . . ." *The Beginning of Philosophy* (Continuum Press, 2000), 97.

²¹⁴ Cf.: *The Greek Concept of Justice*, 243ff. (hereafter page numbers are referenced in the text).

²¹⁵ *The Route of Parmenides*, 264 (hereafter references are included in parentheses in the text).

²¹⁶ See David Gallop's "Introduction" to the translation cited herein (16–17), as well as Cornford, pp. 40ff. and Guthrie, pp. 44ff.

²¹⁷ Although to my knowledge Mourelatos does not make this claim, it complements his analysis of the goddess' mixing of metaphors of night and light in the "Way of Seeming" (cf.: *Route of Parmenides*, 243ff.).

²¹⁸ For ontological and epistemological analyses of the implications of the goddess' "sphere," see Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides*, pp. 120ff., and Frankel's discussion of "symmetrical formation" in "Studies in Parmenides" from *Studies in Presocratic Philosophy: Volume II*, eds. R. E. Allen and David J. Furley (Atlantic Highlands: New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1975) pp. 34ff.

²¹⁹ Here I emend Gallop's translation by excluding the bracketed [it] as implied subject.

²²⁰ Most notably Cornford in *Plato and Parmenides*.

²²¹ While I agree with Patricia Curd that ". . . there is so little evidence that it is quite difficult to be confident about picking out any *details in Parmenides as particularly influenced by the Pythagoreans*" (*The Legacy of Parmenides*, fnt. 47, 19–20, emphasis), it is not without merit to speculate upon possible or plausible general influences within Parmenides' historical era, such as, of course, the communicative practices of "sung speech."

²²² Cf.: B8.13–15 that reads: ". . . therefore neither [its] coming-to-be Nor [its] perishing has Justice allowed, relaxing her shackled, But she holds [it] fast" (Gallop's *Parmenides of Elea*).

²²³ Qtd. Cornford, 13.

²²⁴ That the goddess precludes us from saying or thinking "is not" is nowhere more clearly, and one might say humorously, discussed than in Montgomery Furth's imaginary conversation between "Betathon" and "Parmenides," in "Elements of Eleatic Ontology," *The Pre-Socratics: A Collection of Critical Essays*.

²²⁵ Although Jaeger maintains that the entire poem is a "direct address" to the youth, I suggest that imperatives like "Come" and "Look" in several lines of the poem emphasize that the goddess is directly addressing the youth, as well as each member of the audience.

²²⁶ Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides*, 41.

²²⁷ *Discovery of the Mind*, pp. 45ff. Recent scholarship on the odes of Pindar also reveals juxtapositions of contrary images that I suggest might be similar—at least stylistically—to the goddess’ mixed metaphors of the “Way of Seeming” (William H Race, “Negative Expressions” in *Style and Rhetoric in Pindar’s Odes* [Atlanta, GA: Scholar’s Press, 1990]).

²²⁸ Here I refer to the account of sources of the fragments comprising the “Way of Seeming” from David Gallop’s *Parmenides of Elea*.

²²⁹ According to Mourelatos, while 9/10’s of the “Way of Truth” has survived, only 1/10 of the “Way of Seeming” has been preserved. Cf. also A. A. Long, “This part of the poem is very imperfectly preserved” (Philosophical Poets and Heraclitus” from *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, 249). Gallop comments: “Diels’ estimate, that nine-tenths of the ‘Way of Truth’ and one-tenth of the ‘Way of Seeming’ have survived, would yield a poem of some 500 lines total, whereas West puts it at more like 300. No basis for these estimates is provided by their authors, and the question of length remains a matter of speculation” (fnt. 8, p. 29).

²³⁰ Although arguments are sometimes offered for the possibility of three “routes” of inquiry, I do not think such arguments are valid given the philosophical intent of the entire of the poem, for I agree, with Mourelatos and others, that the goddess is concerned to critique a certain form of dualism (*The Route of Parmenides*, pp. 131ff.), the trope for which is, of course, the two “routes.”

²³¹ Cf.: Taran’s distinction between a cosmology that refers to how the sensible world *is* and cosmogony as “the result of Parmenides’ theory of knowledge” (*Parmenides*, 236). The distinction is valuable because it elucidates the interpretative differences between reading Parmenides’ as expounding a natural theory or a theory of how humans come to know nature.

²³² Gallop, *Parmenides of Elea*, 6.

²³³ Although attempts have been made to focus upon the relationship between Parmenides’ language and how it intends or imports his ontology, I suggest that many of these analyses impose a correspondence theory of language and truth which is not necessarily implied by Parmenides’ poem. That is, on the issue of “naming” as such, we tend to read “*esti*” as “*einai*” and from here speculate upon the meaning of an apparent noun, “Being.” For instance, and as discussed below: “Name and world are reciprocally dependent, since a name implies that world of which it is a name and the world, which must find expression, can find it only if the name is used of itself” (Leon Woodbury, “Parmenides On Names,” p. 157). But I question whether Parmenides would agree both that the world “must find expression” and that this expression, its proper name, is the goal of the youth’s “quest.”

²³⁴ Heidegger does not say that Plato himself does this—although Owen implies so—but that much of our understanding of Plato’s “forms” has been interpreted through Plotinus and a tradition of NeoPlatonism. According to Heidegger, Plotinus takes Parmenides to say: “Being is something nonsensible.” And so if we listen only to Plotinus we might inadvertently Platonize (or Neoplatonize) Parmenides.

- ²³⁵ "Parmenides on Names" in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, ed. John P. Anton with George L. Kustas, 1971, p. 156 (hereafter references will be included in the text).
- ²³⁶ In Gallop, B7 reads: For never shall this prevail, that things that are not are; But do you restrain your thought from this route of inquiry, Nor let habit force you, along this route of much-experience, To ply an aimless eye and ringing ear And tongue; but judge by reasoning the very contentious disproof That has been uttered by me.
- ²³⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, p. 85.
- ²³⁸ William Chase Greene, in "Fate, Good, and Evil in Pre-Socratic Philosophy," also finds similarities between Plato and Parmenides, and particularly in relation to the *Timaeus* and to a broad distinction between Reality and Appearance. For Plato *as well as* Parmenides there is: "The world of Ideas on the one hand, the world of concrete phenomena on the other hand" (106).
- ²³⁹ "Plato and Parmenides on the Timeless Present" in *The Pre-Socratics: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alexander P. Mourelatos, 1974, qtd. pp. 329–30 (hereafter references will be included in parentheses in the text).
- ²⁴⁰ Mathematical objects, too, do not change, but Owen rejects the notion that the idea of a "timeless present" originates with Pythagoreanism because of Aristotle's recognition of certain confusion in the Pythagorean position(s) (p. 318).
- ²⁴¹ Although Owen does not cite any direct Aristotelian reference, on his view Aristotle is beneficiary to a century-long discussion inspired by Parmenides.
- ²⁴² Gallop's B8.5, for comparison, reads: "Nor was [it] once, nor will [it] be, since [it] is, now, all together."
- ²⁴³ Owen's paraphrase.
- ²⁴⁴ Detienne, for one, uses this translation of the formula as well as "that which has been, that which is, and that which will be" (*Masters of Truth*, 74).
- ²⁴⁵ According to Owen, it is actually Melissus who emends Parmenides' vocabulary and includes the term "always" in his account of a "timeless" time. This means that Melissus allows in many other terms that find no place in Parmenides' verses and, in sum, offers an account which amounts to saying that "whatever is true of any of these times is true of all of them" (324). The question remains, of course, whether Melissus is not far from the truth. While the term *aei* is not included in our ms. of B8 in Parmenides' poem, this does not seem to be reason enough to assume that Melissus is wrong in his understanding of Parmenides' purpose and meaning, particularly given Melissus' historical and cultural proximity to the poem. For a discussion of *aei* in ancient Greek thought see Heidegger's *The Concept of Time*, trans. William McNeill (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1992).
- ²⁴⁶ "Some Alternative Interpretations of Parmenides" in *The Monist* (62), 1979 (hereafter page numbers will be included in parentheses in the text).
- ²⁴⁷ Mourelatos here refers to Owen's 1960 "Eleatic Questions," Furth's "Elements of Eleatic Ontology" from 1968, and Kahn's "The Thesis of Parmenides" (1969) and *The Verb "Be" in Ancient Greek*, 1973. Mourelatos also reformulates the four theses of the standard interpretation into five in order to pay

homage to Raven-Calagero's insights and contributions. See p. 4ff. for this argument as well as Mourelatos' criticisms of it.

²⁴⁸ Mourelatos uses the term "excluded," but this seems too strong. Charles Kahn, in "The Thesis of Parmenides," does discuss the "proem," but suggests that "the proem informs us that Parmenides search is a search for knowledge." Pace suggestions that Parmenides seeks a cosmological account of *eov*, Kahn writes: "The problem which Parmenides raises *from the beginning of his poem* is not the problem of cosmology but the problem of knowledge, more exactly, the problem of the *search* for knowledge, the choice between alternative ways for thought and cognition to travel on in pursuit of Truth" (704–05). Mourelatos' objection stands, however, because Kahn does interpret the "proem" in hindsight of how he reads the "Way of Truth" and seemingly dismisses what follows the "Way of Truth" as cosmological but *not* epistemological speculation.

²⁴⁹ Charles Kahn, *The Thesis of Parmenides*, 711 (hereafter all page numbers will be included in parentheses in the text).

²⁵⁰ Patricia Curd, *The Legacy of Parmenides: Eleatic Monism and Later Presocratic Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 39ff. (hereafter page numbers will be referenced in the text). Curd notes that in later works Mourelatos refined the term "speculative predication" as well as its idea to offer an "is" of "introduction and recognition, since it has its paradigm . . . in acquaintance" (40).

²⁵¹ This is Curd's phrase for elucidating Mourelatos' "speculative predication," (fnt. 45, p. 40), that I take to be similar to Curd's understanding of *esti* as "an informative identity claim, an assertion that when true, reveals the nature of a thing, saying just what something is" (39).

²⁵² For further discussion and references regarding written texts and oral audiences see Hershbell, Waugh and West in *The Third Way*, ed. Francisco J. Gonzalez [Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995].

²⁵³ Cf.: *Theogeny*, "we know how to say many false things that seem like true sayings, but we also know how to speak the truth when we wish to" (27–8), trans. Richard Lattimore.

²⁵⁴ Heidegger, too recognizes what is "not-forgotten" as a literal translation of *aletheia* (*Parmenides*, 71ff.). But, as mentioned in "Introductory Remarks" and Chapter Seven, Heidegger seems more concerned to understand *aletheia* in visual rather than aural terms. While Heidegger certainly objects to purely "representational" readings of the early *sophoi*, he does, in my opinion, undervalue the audible and thereby potentially nonrepresentational aspects and elements of the sound of speech.

²⁵⁵ This image of Parmenides is contrary to, for example, Detienne's image of Parmenides as an elect person, a "master of truth," who is "aware of what sets him apart from other men and what makes him exceptional" (*Masters of Truth*, 130ff.).

²⁵⁶ Qtd. Detienne, *Masters of Truth*, 72.

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